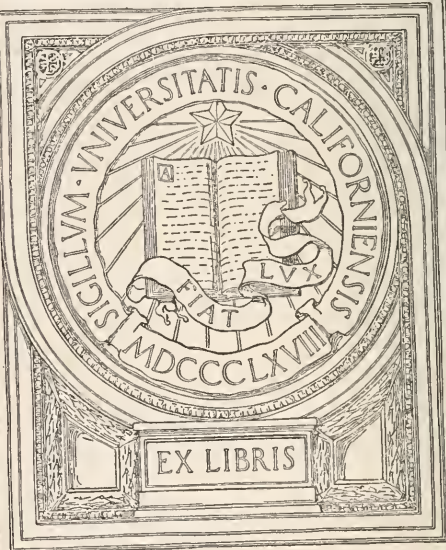


THE INFLUENCE
OF DANTE
ON
MODERN THOUGHT

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The Influence of Dante on Modern Thought

BEING THE LE BAS PRIZE ESSAY, 1894

BY

HERMANN OELSNER, B.A.,

Late Scholar of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge

King, that hast reign'd six hundred
years, and grown

In power, and ever growest. . . .

TENNYSON (*To Dante*)

LONDON

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PREFACE.

EVERY one who has occupied himself with Dante must feel that it is practically impossible to say anything new of this poet, who has probably been more exhaustively treated by commentators, literary historians, essayists, and critics than any other modern writer, with the exception of Shakespeare. However, curiously enough, the subject of the present essay would not appear to have been treated in a *comprehensive* form as yet.

As will be seen from our quotations, single points have already been touched incidentally by numerous authors: these we have in every instance acknowledged.

We should perhaps express our special indebtedness to Dean Plumptre, whose second volume gave us many hints, and makes us regret that he was prevented from carrying out his project of treating the very theme of our essay. Of general works, those on the Renaissance by Symonds and Burckhardt have been most suggestive. Ozanam (*Dante et la philosophie catholique*) was naturally of great

use in the section dealing with philosophy, and in questions of art we derived much aid from Janitschek's *Die Kunstlehre Dante's und Giotto's Kunst*.

It will be noted that we have, wherever we felt it to be necessary, dealt critically with the material at our disposal: we may instance the questions of Petrarch, of the Humanistic Studies, and of the Reformation.

If we may appear to have dwelt at too great length on Dante's individuality, our excuse must be that we had taken as our basis the well-known essay of Schelling, which we considered to be the best explanation that had as yet been given of Dante's enormous power.¹

We have never hesitated to quote other writers, whether from polemical motives or as illustrating what we had to say; above all, we have always preferred to let the representatives of "modern thought" speak for themselves.

Translations of passages have been given only where it was considered to be absolutely necessary. Dante has been quoted in Italian, because it was thought that the present essay would be of interest only to such as could read the poet in the original, or at any rate had a translation at their disposal.

¹ For a short abstract of this paper, cf. *inf.*, pp. 8 and 9.

THE INFLUENCE OF DANTE ON MODERN THOUGHT.

IN the course of our Dante studies we have several times seen the wish expressed that the subject of the present essay should be treated comprehensively. "Il serait curieux, sans doute, il serait intéressant, pour l'histoire intellectuelle de l'Europe, d'étudier pas à pas, et dès l'origine, le progrès continu du *dantisme*. . . . Mais, pour tout dire à cet égard, il faudrait certes plus que le savoir d'un seul, et plus que la capacité d'un livre."¹ Or again: "Ce serait certainement un travail plein d'intérêt que la recherche de l'influence de la *Divina Commedia* sur les esprits, sur la littérature, sur la poésie, sur les arts, sur la science même, non seulement dans la Péninsule,

¹ Charles Calemard de Lafayette (*Dante-Michel-Ange-Machiavel*).

mais dans l'Europe entière. Cette étude, qui exigerait une grande universalité de savoir, une érudition profonde, des connaissances infiniment variées, un vif sentiment poétique, conditions rares à réunir, serait digne d'une haute intelligence."¹ While agreeing with these writers as to the interest of the subject, we are at the same time fully aware that we do not bring to the task the acquirements and qualities they rightly designate as being necessary for its satisfactory fulfilment. Accordingly we shall only endeavour to sketch rapidly Dante's influence on the various departments of European thought, without attempting to enter into the manifold details which the subject suggests at every step.

For the better understanding of what is to follow, it seems desirable to begin with a short survey of the literary history of Dante's works. And here one fact, which has been frequently noted, must never be lost sight of—namely, that the periods of Dante's glory invariably correspond with those of taste in literature and general culture, and that, when these were at a low ebb, Dante, too, was neglected. "Betrachten

¹ Paul Drouilhet de Sigalas (*De l'art en Italie*). See also Scartazzini's *Prolegomeni*, pp. 546, 547, for a very similar passage.

Sie die italienische Kunst ; der Verfall beginnt wo die Maler aufhören Dante in sich zu tragen," said Cornelius to Herman Grimm.¹ These words must not by any means be limited to the region of art, or indeed to Italy alone. They are applicable with at least the same amount of truth also to literature in its various expressions, and to the general moral tone—let any one make the experiment on himself, and see whether he is able to appreciate or even to read the *Commedia*, unless his mind be wholly free from worldly thoughts ; nor have we any doubt but that this phenomenon, this "double glory" of Dante's, as Symonds happily calls it, would be traceable in the other countries to a far greater extent even than is the case, if Dante's works had been generally diffused over Europe at an earlier period. For it is not till the end of the last and the beginning of the present century, that anything approaching a general appreciation of the poet is to be noted, and then only among the highest minds. Indeed Dante has never been and never will become popular. When a man of parts such as Schlosser, the historian, tells us that he did not understand the

¹ "Consider Italian art ; its decay begins from the moment the painters cease to carry the image of Dante in their hearts." (Grimm, *Leben Michelangelos*.)

Commedia till after the ninth reading, this is not to be wondered at.¹ But although the larger public has never studied the works of the poet, it must not be inferred that Dante's influence has extended to individuals alone. It is no less a person than Edgar Quinet who takes this strange view: "Son influence a été immense sur les individus, et nulle sur la société."² We shall endeavour to show that the individuals in question were for the most part great leaders of thought, and that, by their instrumentality, the seed of Dante's thought has been sown broadcast among the principal nations of the world.

And which are the nations that we shall have to consider? First and foremost, of course, the country of the poet himself, where, in spite of fluctuating fortunes, his fame has never been wholly eclipsed. In the 14th century the numerous chairs founded in the leading cities of Italy for the purpose of making the *Commedia* more widely known, would be proof sufficient of the high favour in which the poet stood, even if we did not possess the testimonies of contemporaries. Boccaccio's feelings for his master are well known,

¹ That Dante was fully aware of the difficulty of his work is shown by such passages as *Par.* ii. 1-15.

² *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, i. 7.

and we shall try to show later that Petrarch, too, owed more to his great predecessor than he was inclined to admit. Towards the close of the 15th century came the disturbing elements introduced by the supporters of the classical Renaissance, who apparently failed to grasp the fact that it was Dante himself who first aroused a general taste for classical literature. They regarded him only as supporter of the Italian vulgar tongue, and as such neglected—nay, even decried him. Marsilio Ficino's admiration for Dante was limited to the elements of the Platonic doctrine contained in his work. In the following century, the Jesuits began their hostile attitude, which was to continue for no less than three hundred years, and was the chief cause of the comparative neglect into which Dante fell. Added to this, Pulci and Ariosto introduced a lighter taste into literature, which became more and more deteriorated, and, culminating in the Arcadia and school of Marini, rendered a general study of so earnest a work impossible.¹ Indeed the study of Dante may be said to have come to an end for the time being at the close of the 16th

¹ That other countries were equally unfit at this time to appreciate serious works is shown by the *gongorismo* and Euphuism of Spain and England.

century.¹ His work has now to submit to an academic treatment, and he is proved to sin against Aristotle's laws. In the 17th century only minute details are considered — in short, a kind of mechanical devotion succeeds to the sincere and spontaneous admiration of former generations. Of the 18th century it may almost be said that Bettinelli and, in France, his friend Voltaire, express the general opinion; but already an improvement is to be remarked, which was carefully fostered by such men as Varano, and which culminated in the great Dante revival at the close of the century. Germany, France, and England almost simultaneously join in the cult which was to produce such far-reaching results, and more recently America.

One country occupies a unique position, and may be dealt with definitively in this place. Spain, as she began with the greatest promise, was also the first to fall out of the ranks. In the 15th century there are two translations in

¹ Three of the greatest Italian names stand out as conspicuous exceptions during this long period of the decadence of Dante's power. With Machiavelli and Michelangelo we shall have to deal later on. Galilei was no less ardent a student of our poet: among other things he defended his cosmography twice against Benivieni before the Academy of Pisa.

the same year (1428), the one by Febrer into Catalan, the other by Villena into Castilian; and the works of Santillana and Juan de Mena contain obvious imitations from Dante's great poem. However, gradually all such traces begin to disappear in the literature, the translation of Villegas, and Quevedo's *Sueños*, which sometimes breathe Dante's spirit, being the only notable exceptions. The reasons for this are not far to seek. It was only natural, that such a Catholic people as the Spanish should view with suspicion a work portions of which had been condemned by the Inquisition. How small and insignificant these portions were, they probably never took the trouble to find out. And besides, when the bad taste in literature had subsided, and the general curiosity and liberalism of this century had found its way into Spain, the people had enough to do in rescuing their own noble literature from oblivion: from such poems as the *Cid* fresh vigour was also to be gained.¹

The first reading of Dante's works produces in us a feeling of wonder at their author's astounding

¹ We may add, however, that Dante appears to be winning his way back into Spain, to judge from several translations and an imitation in the shape of Campoamor's *El drama universal*, that have appeared during the last two or three decades.

range of subject, his almost unparalleled universality. But on penetrating more deeply into our study, Dante the man stands before us, with his intense individuality, and fills us with yet greater admiration. We feel with Michelangelo that "simil uom nè maggior non nacque mai." Matthew Arnold once asked: "What is really precious and inspiring, in all we get from literature, except the sense of an immediate contact with genius itself?" We, for our part, are sensible of this contact to a far greater extent in the case of Dante than with any other poet, just owing to the individuality of which we are speaking.—Schelling, in his admirable essay, *Ueber Dante in philosophischer Beziehung* (1803), was the first to demonstrate the importance of Dante in the history of European culture, viewed from this double standpoint. He shows us how, with the ancients, the universal was really the particular, and how, in the modern world, the individual is the starting-point and must become universal. While ancient poetry was, as a general rule, kept distinct from philosophy and science, Dante not only recognised that art demands a definite, rounded subject, but he also saw that the modern spirit required a great work to be of infinite range, that everything must be included in it—the past, the present, and the future, politics

and science, philosophy and religion, and that the individuality of the poet must select the essential points and those of permanent interest, and weld them into a whole in a unique framework, in which allegory and history necessarily form the chief elements. By uniting all these qualities in his poem, Schelling concludes, Dante became the founder of modern poetry and art, and whoever would understand these must first study the source from which they sprang.

It was Italy of all the countries of modern Europe that first began to treat all things objectively, and in Italy, too, the subjective character of the individual first asserted itself. It is not to be wondered at, then, that that country should have produced the first great figure breathing the modern spirit.

Among the great writers of genius who are at the same time distinguished by individuality of character, Dante may perhaps be assigned the first place, especially if we consider the times in which he was placed. In how many ways does this individuality of his cause him to break with past traditions, and open a new train of thought! What striking originality, for instance, in the very form of his poem, in which the author himself plays the leading part! We sympathise with him at every

step of his long and arduous journey. We feel with him a glow of pride and delight when he tells us that he was permitted to join in the band of great poets, and that his "maestro sorrise di tanto;" and then, when the poets depart with him :

Parlando cose che il tacere è bello,
Si com' era il parlar colà dov' era.—*Inf.* iv.,

we are charmed with the poet's modesty. We feel the poet's grief and shame at Virgil's reproof :

Quand' io il sentii a me parlar con ira, &c.,

and share his joy on hearing his master's soothing words :

Maggior difetto men vergogna lava,
Disse il maestro, che il tuo non è stato ;
Però d'ogni tristizia ti disgrava.—*Inf.* xxx.

And what shall we say of such passages as the meeting with Beatrice, and her reproaches ?

The mere fact of an author relating in the first person is not sufficient to create such perfect sympathy between author and reader, if there is no individuality. This is proved by such works as the old French allegorical romances, where we learn practically nothing of the poet's character,

and, what is more significant still, feel no desire to know more of him.

We would say a word, too, of Dante's delicate sensibility, which was extraordinarily developed. Indeed, we question whether many persons of whatsoever age would be capable of such exquisitely refined feeling as is shown in the passage in which the poet, on seeing the wretched souls of the envious shrouded in hair-cloth, with their eyes sewn together as it were with pieces of wire, exclaims :

A me pareva andando fare oltraggio
Vedendo altrui, non essendo veduto.

Purg. xiii. 73.

If we turn from tenderness such as this to the wonderful :

“Ma distendi oramai in qua la mano ;
Aprimi gli occhi.” Ed io non gliele apersi ;
E cortesia fu in lui esser villano.

of *Inf.* xxxiii., we get an idea of the completeness of Dante's character, and feel the justice of Mrs. Browning's :

. . . Dante stern
And sweet, whose spirit was an urn
For wine and milk poured out in turn.

A Vision of Poets.

Dante's conception and desire of Fame were evolved completely out of his own character, and may be said to have had no precedent. His second Heaven is filled with the spirits of those whose aim in life were only fame and honour :

Questa picciola stella si correda
Dei buoni spirti, che son stati attivi
Perchè onore e fama gli succeda.—*Par.* vi. 112.

How solicitous he is of his own fame, both among his contemporaries and with posterity !¹ He hopes to overcome the stubborn hearts of the Florentines, and be permitted to return to his beloved city on the strength of the name his works have made him.² And what can be more impressive than the consciousness of his own greatness and importance expressed in several passages? His admission to the band containing the master-poets of the ancient world we have already quoted. He makes Brunetto Latini say to him :

. . . Se tu segui tua stella,
Non puoi fallire a glorioso porto.—*Inf.* xv. 55.

And that he is fully aware of the eminence of his

¹ Innumerable passages in the *Comedy* show that Dante credited others with the same feelings.

² Cf. the beginning of *Par.* xxv.

position in Italian literature, is shown by the following words, more moderate than usual :

Così ha tolto l' uno all' altro Guido
La gloria della lingua ; e forse è nato
Chi l' uno e l' altro cacerà di nido.—*Purg.* xi. 97.

We do not mean to say that Dante was the first to express the idea of Fame. In classical literature we have numerous examples, of which the final ode of Horace's Second Book is a characteristic specimen. But to all who have fathomed Dante's personality, there is something infinitely touching and noble in this conception of his, far removed from anything selfish or base. We find his theory summed up in the following stern passage :

Omai convien che tu così ti spoltre,
Disse il maestro ; chè seggendo in piuma,
In fama non si vien, nè sotto coltre ;
Senza la qual chi sua vita consuma,
Cotal vestigio in terra di sè lascia
Qual fummo in aer ed in acqua la schiuma.

Inf. xxiv. 46.

That men who did not feel as he did, fail to arouse admiration in us, is clear from the example of Petrarch, whose efforts in the same direction (as in

the *Africa*) were certainly dictated by very different sentiments.

The story of Dante's life, in its wonderful three-fold development, affords a long series of proofs of the poet's independence of character. Two circumstances especially make his utterances sublime and enduring, because they come from his innermost heart—we mean his love for Beatrice, and his exile. Alfred de Musset's grand comparison of such men to the pelican who feeds his young with his own heart's blood, applies to no poet better than to Dante :

Rien ne nous rend si grands qu'une grande douleur.

Les plus désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux,
Et j'en sais d'immortels qui sont de purs sanglots.

Poète, c'est ainsi que font les grands poètes.
Ils laissent s'égayer ceux qui vivent un temps ;
Mais les festins humains qu'ils servent à leurs fêtes
Ressemblent la plupart à ceux des pélicans.

Nuit de Mai.

Does not Dante tell us himself that his poem has made him "lean for many years" ?

Some of the traits of his character stand out with especial clearness in the *Vita Nuova* and

Canzoniere. It has always appeared to us singularly significant that the former work should have been almost completely neglected, even in Italy, until this century, when the interest in psychological analysis first became general. In the Middle Ages the study of "Self" would appear to have been avoided, as of insufficient interest for the general public, till Dante came and showed by his great example what true lyrical poetry really means. Only two sonnets of his are objective—namely, *Tanto gentile* and *Vede perfettamente*, in which the poet praises the perfections of his mistress; and in these, as Burckhardt has aptly remarked, Dante feels called upon to apologise. The one ends:

E par che della sua labbia si muova
 Uno spirto soave e pien d' amore,
 Che va dicendo all' anima : sospira.

and the other :

Ed è negli atti suoi tanto gentile,
 Che nessun la si può recare a mente,
 Che non sospiri in dolcezza d' amore.

The minor poems are indeed utterances of lyrical subjectiveness which become objective and of universal value by their sincerity and beauty of form. They serve as a landmark between mediæval and

modern love-poetry, as we shall have occasion to show later.

We cannot attempt in this place to give a full account of the enormous part played by Dante's personality, whether directly, or indirectly through the medium of his works, and the reader will find no difficulty in supplying this gap for himself as he goes on : thus, to give only one instance, it is plain that Dante the man was a source of emulation to the great Italian patriots of this century, quite as much as his works. But one result of the poet's individuality has yet to be pointed out, this not being so obvious—we mean that subjective way of looking at all things, also those of the outer world, of which Dante was the first exponent, and which has found so much favour with modern poets. Let us take the famous description of night which opens the sixth canto of *Purgatory*, and, in order to bring our point into better relief, compare it with a similar passage in the *Æneid* (IV. 522-528). Virgil says, inimitably in his way :

"Twas dead of night, when weary bodies close
Their eyes in balmy sleep and soft repose ;
The winds no longer whisper through the woods,
Nor murmuring tides disturb the gentle floods ;
The stars in silent order moved around,
And peace, with downy wings, was brooding on the ground ;

The flocks and herds, and parti-coloured fowl,
Which haunt the woods or swim the weedy pool,
Stretched on the quiet earth securely lay,
Forgetting the past labours of the day.

Dryden's Translation.

Now, the only attempt at inner analysis to be found here is contained in the words *corda oblita laborum*. If we turn to the passage in Dante, no one can fail to remark how totally different is the method employed. Byron, one of the most modern of modern poets, was so struck by its grandeur, that he translated it almost literally for his *Don Juan*:

Soft hour ! which wakes the wish and melts the heart
Of those who sail the seas, on the first day
When they from their sweet friends are torn apart ;
Or fills with love the pilgrim on his way
As the far bell of vesper makes him start,
Seeming to weep the dying day's decay.

The mere fact of the translation would obviously be very much to our purpose, but the stanza affords yet another point of study. As Littré puts it (for he, too, has made use of these passages, though for a different purpose), Dante has only "opened the perspective" to the modern poet, who prolongs it with a beautiful thought born from

his innermost feelings, so deeply had these feelings been roused by Dante's psychological description of a natural phenomenon !

Is this a fancy which our reason scorns ?

Ah ! surely nothing dies but something mourns !

Don Juan, iii. 108.¹

Already by his contemporaries Dante was regarded not merely as a poet, but also as a philosopher and theologian. This view seems to us perfectly justified, although so many critics, Russell Lowell among the number, persist in refusing to recognise Dante as great in anything but in poetry. It is refreshing to find our poet receiving his due at the hands of Raphael, who, in the Vatican Frescoes, depicts him in the garb of each of the

¹ Here, too, belongs the imagery "drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed," of which Shelley says that it is "unusual in modern poetry, although Dante and Shakespeare are full of instances of the same kind : Dante, indeed, more than any other poet, and with greater success" (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*). It is true that he specially adds that the Greeks were his masters for this particular method, but other poets, such as Tennyson and, above all, the Italians, in all probability derived their use of it from Dante.—This is also one of the points which impressed themselves most deeply on the minds of the Italian painters of the 14th century.

above callings. That he should have been endowed with all the learning of the time is perhaps in itself not so remarkable as the fact that he was undoubtedly the first layman of such culture who has left lasting record of himself. From the close of the *Vita Nuova* we gather that he acquired the greater part of his erudition after the death of Beatrice, with the purpose of composing a work in honour of his Beloved, in which he was to "say of her things which had never been said of any woman."

First among the important points constituting the universalism of the *Comedy* is that the poem contains the quintessence of mediæval thought, which Dante immortalised at a moment when, as Symonds has pointed out, it was already losing its reality for the Italian people. We cannot insist too strongly on the fact that the *Divina Commedia* is essentially a mediæval poem, not the first modern poem, as has so often been maintained. The framework Dante selects is that of the numerous visions current in his time; his faith, his opinions, his education, and his science all belong to this period. Above all, he is the pupil of Aquinas, and his principal master in philosophy is the philosopher *par excellence* of scholasticism—Aristotle, the "father of all who know." Plato's day

was yet to come, and accordingly we find comparatively few traces of his writings in Dante. From all this it may be gathered that whoever would understand the Middle Ages must study and understand Dante. While most competent judges have now arrived at this conclusion, the reverse is by no means so generally recognised. How often have critics, while doing full justice to our poet from the æsthetic point of view, yet failed to grasp the important point that Dante must be studied in connection with his age if he is to be rightly understood! Would Leigh Hunt, for example, have applied to him the epithet of "barbarian," and heaped so much abuse on his head, if he had not insisted on regarding him from his own limited modern standpoint? ¹ Some decades ago there might have been found people denying the value of mediæval thought, with its

¹ In this connection the following words of Goldsmith are also of interest:—"He addressed a barbarous people in a method suited to their apprehensions; united purgatory and the river Styx, St. Peter and Virgil, heaven and hell together, and shows a strange mixture of good sense and absurdity. The truth is, he owes most of his reputation to the obscurity of the times in which he lived. As in the land of Benin a man may pass for a prodigy of parts who can read, so in an age of barbarity, a small degree of excellence ensures success" (*The Present State of Polite Learning*, chap. iii.).

scholasticism and other systems that have had their day. A good example is G. H. Lewes, who, in his otherwise excellent *History of Philosophy*, thinks fit to omit the whole period. Fortunately such ideas are now gradually disappearing, while the value of mediæval studies is becoming generally admitted.

In such matters it is easy to mistake effect for cause; but we, for our part, are convinced that the study of mediævalism is to a large extent due to the renewal of Dante studies in Europe, or, at any rate, would not have become so general if there had been no Dante to act as a primary inducement. When Carlyle says in his *Hero-Worship*, "The *Divina Commedia* is of Dante's writing; yet in truth *it* belongs to ten Christian centuries, only the finishing of it is Dante's"—he utters a great truth, but not the whole truth. If we read a little farther, we find a hint of that for which we are seeking, and which must ever remain Dante's chief title to fame—the kernel of his greatness, as it were: "Dante is the spokesman of the Middle Ages; the Thought they lived by stands here in everlasting music. These sublime ideas of his, terrible and beautiful, are the fruit of the Christian Meditation of all the good men who had gone before him. Precious they; but also is not he

precious? Much, had not he spoken, would have been dumb; not dead, yet living voiceless."

It is difficult to assign to Dante his proper place in the history of philosophy. While he undoubtedly gave to many directions a new impulse, yet it must be conceded that he is, in the great majority of his views, a child of his time. Most of all, of course, he is indebted to Thomas Aquinas. Without wishing to dwell on a fact that is so generally known, we would at least draw attention to the important point that "Aquinas really baptized Aristotelian thought, and put an end to the suspicion with which the Church had for long regarded it" (Liddon). Both St. Thomas and Dante aimed at presenting theology as the universal science. But it must not be thought that only the Aristotelian Dominican Aquinas presided over Dante's philosophical training. There is no doubt that he learnt much of his mysticism from the Platonising Franciscan Bonaventura; and besides, his works show traces of the study of St. Augustine and Boethius—in short, of all the philosophy available at the time.

However much we may admire the schoolmen, their wonderful learning and sometimes really great thought, we must, if we judge impartially, admit that their philosophy was destined to perish with-

out leaving any traces if it had not been rescued from its original and wholly unpalatable form by the great Florentine.¹ For it would surely not be too rash to credit Dante with a share in the extraordinary revival of St. Thomas's doctrines in the Catholic Church during the pontificate of Pius IX., whose admiration for the poet is well known. It is at any rate a fact that the present Pope, Leo XIII.—another Dante enthusiast—in the year 1886 established a permanent course of Dante lectures in the Istituto Leoniano (connected with the Scuole di Sant' Apollinare), and that it was at the time generally recognised that this innovation was closely connected with the restoration of the Thomistic philosophy, which, as the Pope wisely saw, could not be presented in a more inviting and convincing form than in the *Comedy*.

Ozanam, who divides great philosophers into "génies de direction" and "génies de découvertes," is perfectly right in placing Dante in the

¹ Cf. a poetical passage of Herman Grimm: "The learning that fills us with gloom, like the walls of a prison, in the writings of St. Thomas of Aquinas, rises up in Dante's poem like some airy, free, and sunlit pile of architecture, with trees in blossom that force their way over the walls, and brooks, full of life, that rush through the silence of the place. Dante has conferred immortality on scholasticism" (Essays III., *Raphael's Schule von Athen*).

first class. For, although repeated efforts have been made to demonstrate the importance of Dante's position in the history of science—one enthusiast even goes so far as to base the first of a series of papers on this subject on a work which is in all probability spurious¹—we have never been able to convince ourselves of the truth of these arguments. On reading the Harveian Oration delivered by Dr. Pye-Smith, F.R.S., in October, 1893, a passage struck us as expressing exactly our own view on the question, and we quote it all the more readily, as Dante has so often been credited with foreseeing the discovery here alluded to: “. . . But it would be unreasonable to infer from such passages that the circulation of the blood was then known, as from the lines that Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Brutus: ‘As dear to me as are the ruddy drops That visit my sad heart.’”² As Paley justly puts it, he only discovers who proves. To hit upon the true conjecture here and there amid a crowd of untrue, and leave it again without appreciation of its importance, is the sign, not of intelligence, but of frivolity.”³ Dante can-

¹ Schmidt, *Dante's Stellung in der Kosmographie*. I. *De aqua et terra*.

² The corresponding passage in Dante is *Inf.* i. 20.

³ We quote from the *Times*, October 19, 1893.

not, of course, be blamed for the faults of his commentators. That he knew the value of experiments as well as his great contemporary, Roger Bacon,¹ is shown by the words :

Esperienza
Ch' esser suol fonte ai rivi di vostr' arti.

Par. ii. 95.

Dante's services to natural science, then, did not consist in original contributions, and the passages that may be brought forward only show that their author sometimes had the presentiment of great discoveries, by the aid of that secret intuition which we often remark in men of great and universal genius. However, he undoubtedly did a great deal towards popularising the science of the time by writing his *Convito* in the vulgar tongue—a point to which we shall have occasion to revert later.

In discussing Dante's relations to scholasticism, it has too often been overlooked that he saw through most of the radical faults of that system,

¹ Cf., for example, the following from the *Opus Tertium* :
“ I call experimental science that which neglects arguments, for the strongest arguments prove nothing so long as the conclusions are not verified by experience.” See also another passage, *ib.* xiii.

and thus gave proof of his independence of thought, here as in so many instances ; above all, we may gather from many passages that he was the first great thinker of modern times who was determined on dealing with things rather than with words. Thus he contests the absolute infallibility of the syllogism,¹ and that he was bent on showing his comparative contempt for dialectics, is clear from the passage in which he compares that science to the Heaven of Mercury : "E 'l cielo di Mercurio si può comparare alla dialettica per due proprietà ; chè Mercurio è la più piccola stella del cielo ; . . . l' altra proprietà si è, chè più va velata de' raggi del sole, che null' altra stella. E queste due proprietadi sono nella dialettica ; chè la dialettica è minore in suo corpo, che null' altra scienza ; . . . e va più velata, che nulla scienza, in quanto procede con più sofistici e probabili argomenti, più che altra."²

Only those who have studied the philosophical writings of those ages can fully grasp the revolutionary nature of these words.

Before leaving this subject, we should like to quote two more passages from the *Comedy*, con-

¹ *De Mon.* ii. 6, "Nam si ex falsis syllogismis," &c.

² *Conv.* ii. 14.

taining the poet's riper thought. Nothing could exceed the sarcasm with which he compares the object King Solomon had in view when he demanded wisdom of God, with the aim of contemporary science and philosophy: Solomon prayed for wisdom in order to be able to govern wisely, and not—

. . . per saper lo numero in che ènno
 Li motor di quassù, o se *necesse*
 Con contingente mai *necesse* fenno ;
 Non, *si est dare primum notum esse*,
 O se del mezzo cerchio far si puote
 Triangol si ch' un retto non avesse.—*Par. xiii. 97.*

And more decisive still are the words :

O insensata cura dei mortali,
 Quanto son diffettivi sillogismi
 Quei che ti fanno in basso batter l' ali !
Par. xi. 1.

Dante saw that the faults of scholasticism were due to the general vices of the time, which he pointed out whenever the opportunity presented itself. We find a characteristic example in the *Convito* (iv. 15), where he comes to speak of the “tre orribili infermitadi nella mente degli uomini,” and quotes the Proverbs, Aristotle, and Cicero against them.

He always felt that his task would be but half fulfilled if he did not try to correct the errors "dei ciechi che si fanno duci," so as to enable his fellow-creatures to mend their ways. What could be more admirable, for example, than the passage in which he shows how Love is the cause of all good, and also of all evil, with its eminently Dantesque ending :

Or ti puote apparer quant' è nascosa
La veritade alla gente, ch' avvera
Ciascun amore in sè laudabil cosa ;
Però che forse appar la sua matera
Sempr' esser buona, ma non ciascun segno
È buono, ancor che buona sia la cera.

Purg. xviii. 34.

Sometimes Dante may appear at a first glance hopelessly mediæval, especially in matters of religion and orthodoxy. How often, for example, has he been condemned for the ruthless barbarity he displays towards the "heathens" in his Limbo ; and yet the Eagle, discoursing on Divine Justice in the *Paradiso*, utters words of wisdom on this subject that are so far from being mediæval in spirit, that it could not but prove beneficial to modern society and civilisation, if certain agitators, our contemporaries, would take them to heart and learn to act on them. Shelley says somewhere of

Dante's words, that "many as yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with a lighting that has as yet found no conductor."¹ The words in question appear to belong to this category. The whole passage is of wonderful interest, as it lays bare to us the first great modern mind, still shackled by mediæval prejudices, struggling for that truth and enlightenment which it was in so many cases to attain. We give only the following, which contains the essential point :

. . . A questo regno
 Non salì mai chi non credette in Cristo,
 Nè pria nè poi ch' ei si chiavasse al legno.
 Ma vedi, molti gridan "Cristo, Cristo,"
 Che saranno in giudizio assai men *prope*
 A lui, che tal che non conosce Cristo ;
 E tai cristiani dannerà l' Etiòpe,
 Quando si partiranno i due collegi,
 L' uno in eterno ricco, e l' altro inope.

Par. xix. 103.

We hold, with Ozanam,² that Dante may be connected with modern empirism by his efforts at logical reform, by his sketch of a new method, and by the liberty of his thought ; while he is to be regarded as one of the most remarkable precursors of modern rationalism by the moral and political scope of his philosophy. We are aware that

¹ *Defence of Poetry.* ² *Dante et la philosophie catholique*, iii. 4.

the filling up of the gap between Dante and later philosophers, such as Bacon, Descartes and Leibnitz, would be no easy matter, but we would remind the reader of certain words of Goethe, which we feel apply to Dante's case with singular aptness: "Es ist nicht immer nöthig, dass das Wahre sich verkörpere; schon genug, wenn es geistig umherschwebt und Uebereinstimmung bewirkt, wenn es wie Glockenton ernst freundlich durch die Lüfte wogt."¹

Dante fully grasped the philosophy of history. While he saw that as much might be learnt from some petty contemporary strife, as from the great events of the past, he, at the same time, recognised the necessity of regarding history universally, and in this respect he was the forerunner of Bossuet and later writers. For our purposes we may restrict ourselves to his social philosophy as laid down principally in the *De Monarchia*. He saw that the happiness of the individual rests on that of society, and he was practically the first writer, certainly the first in post-classical times, who attempted to systematise his ideas on this important subject. It is true that the ancient philosophers had not neglected to express their views on the State, and what Aristotle wrote was

¹ *Sprüche in Prosa.*

certainly known to Dante. But in his time the relations of Church and State had come to play such an important part, that the whole aspect of the question was changed, and Dante, who recognised to the full the vital importance of this question, and one of the main direct objects of whose life was an attempt, destined, alas ! to prove futile, to reform the existing conditions—Dante, we say, was perfectly justified in writing at the beginning of his treatise : “ Seeing that among other occult and useful truths, the knowledge of the temporal monarchy is most useful and very much hidden, and that it has never yet been attempted by any one, because it afforded no prospect of direct gain : therefore it is my intention to draw it from its hiding-place, both in order to keep a useful watch over the world, and to be the first to win, with glory to myself, the laurel due to such an effort.”

Some have considered that this work was of no importance for the succeeding ages. Thus, for example, Mr. Bryce says that it is “ an epitaph instead of a prophecy ” (*Holy Roman Empire*). We, for our part, with all due deference to so distinguished a writer, cannot accept this view, although we are quite ready to admit that in form and expression the work is essentially mediæval. We find traces of it in most of the constitutional

literature that was called forth by the struggle between Pope and Emperor, but shall dwell only on Machiavelli; for, although Campanella and many others might appear to preserve Dante's doctrine more intact, their work was of comparatively small influence. That Machiavelli was an ardent student and enthusiastic admirer of Dante is too well known to need any proof. All his writings are thoroughly permeated with the spirit of our poet's thought, sometimes, it is true, so changed as to be hardly recognisable. The reason of this will be clear if we look for a moment at the Italian history of the 14th and 15th centuries. The never-ending strife, the petty warfare and revolutions which Dante had bewailed, went on unceasingly, and Machiavelli's work, as Döllinger has pregnantly put it, was "*die Theorie zu der fast dreihundertjährigen Praxis.*" No wonder, then, that we find less of hope and more of pessimism in Machiavelli. Besides, it is obvious that Dante's theory, though calculated to inspire much noble thought, was impracticable, and may he not himself have had some misgivings about it? Such a clear intellect must have known that there was no room for a phantom Emperor at the side of an all-powerful Pope in Italy. It is true that he longed for the coming

of his imaginary *Veltro*, and for a Pope who would yield all temporal power to the Emperor. All this did not come to pass, and so we must not be surprised at Machiavelli's leaving the Pope out of count altogether. As Pope and Emperor cannot agree, he said, let us have one ruler only. And as he saw that the Italian States were in a condition that required severe handling and relentless treatment, he laid down those famous laws for his *Principe* that have so shocked modern critics. However, where the political circumstances did not render a change of opinion necessary, Machiavelli always followed closely in Dante's steps. Like Dante, he saw that the immorality of Rome and its love of temporal power were the cause of Italy's misery. Like Dante, he strove to reform these evils, and to unite Italy at any price. On the whole, then, we may repeat the words of Mr. Botta,¹ that Machiavelli "adopted the entire political system of the poet, modifying it according to the requirements of the time."²

¹ *Dante as Philosopher, Patriot, and Poet.*

² To such of our readers as require more definite proof, we recommend a perusal of chaps. xi. and liii. of the first Book of the *Discourses on Livy*, which show an intimate knowledge of the *Commedia* and *Monarchia*, Dante's authority being quoted in two important political questions.

Without going further into these details, let us consider the more important of the religious and political changes of modern Europe, and see whether it is possible to connect Dante with some of them.

Dante's orthodoxy is now so firmly established, that we need scarcely dwell on this point. He never breathes a word against Papacy, although he fearlessly upbraids individual Popes, who fully deserve his censure. The Franciscan preachers before him had done exactly the same thing, and the poems of Jacapone da Todi show how general these ideas were at the time. Later, we have Petrarch inveighing against the Avignon Popes quite in the indignant Dante manner, and in all probability inspired by him. And who can say how far Savonarola's preaching was due to the spirit fostered by such writings? We might quote passages from Berni, Pulci and Ariosto to show that these feelings, once aroused, were not allowed to lie dormant; indeed, Popes and Cardinals had become so accustomed to this state of things, that they read and encouraged works containing passages which could not but undermine their power in the end. We do not for a moment wish to suggest that Dante was in any direct sense of the word a Reformer before the

Reformation, as has so often been said : it is well known that some fanatics even went so far in this respect as to maintain that Dante's *VELTRO* was no other than *LVTERO*.¹ We would much rather go to the other extreme, and say with M. Rod that the poet would have put Luther into hell among his schismatics. We cannot be blind to such facts as that the Reformers eventually based all their belief on the Holy Scriptures alone, discarding all post-Biblical traditions and speculation, and that it is practically impossible to prove that a single important Reformer had any acquaintance with the works of Dante. However, we *do* maintain that Dante's was the first mighty and influential voice that laid bare the Papal abuses, which were later to arouse the indignation of the Reformers. His real relation to the Reformation has probably never been expressed with such insight as by Professor Edward Caird, who says in his essay on Dante :² "The revolutionary power of Dante's poetry lay . . . just in this, that Dante held up to mediæval Catholicism its own ideal, the very principle on which it rested,

¹ In 1841 and 1842 Dante was claimed as the precursor of Lutheranism in a series of numbers of the *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, edited by Professor Hengstenberg.

² *Essays on Literature and Philosophy*, vol. i.

and from which it drew all its power, that he judged it by that ideal, and that by that ideal he found it wanting." While, then, we feel that Dante's direct influence on the Reformation generally was restricted to the impulse he gave to religious thought, we do not hesitate to add some data showing that the spirit of his works was so sympathetic to certain *followers* of the Reformers, that they made use of them to strengthen their cause while the movement was in full swing. Thus we find Flacius Illyricus quoting all the passages from the *Commedia* and *Monarchia* which inveigh against the vices of the Papal See, in his *Catalogus Testium Veritatis*, which appeared at Bâle in the year 1556. And in the same Lutheran stronghold there was published, in 1559, not only the *editio princeps* of the *Monarchia*, but at the same time a German translation by Heroldt, which proves how general an interest the work must have excited; and that this interest did not decline appears from the three subsequent editions of the treatise in Bâle (in 1566, 1609 and 1618, when it formed part of Schardius' collection of works on Imperial and Papal authority), and that of Offenbach in 1610—all of these before it was issued from an Italian press. We have also the interesting *Avviso piacevole dato alla bella Italia da un nobile*

Giovane Francese, the authorship of which is doubtful.¹ However, we know that it was published in 1586 or 1587 at Geneva, a city likewise famous in the annals of the Reformation. In this treatise Dante is used as one of the chief authorities in support of the new movement; it was answered by the famous Jesuit Bellarmine, who had of course not much difficulty in quoting numerous passages which testify to Dante's reverence for the Papacy.

In this connection we may touch a point which we have already had occasion to refer to briefly, and which is of the greatest importance to the student of Dante's influence, or rather of the power that was felt to be inherent in what he wrote—we mean the relations of the Jesuits to Dante's works. For this great and influential body did not by any means always take the enlightened view of Bellarmine; on the contrary, they for the most part relentlessly persecuted the poet's works and the writings they called forth. The mere fact that only one copy of Perot's treatise is known to exist speaks volumes for their

¹ De Thou mentions a certain François Perot as author.—Such examples might easily be multiplied, and we may instance from the seventeenth century the controversy between De Mornay, Coeffeteau, and Rivet (1611-1617), in which Dante's authority was claimed by both sides.

vigilance. In this they merely followed the precedent of the very highest dignitaries of their Church, such as the Cardinal del Poggetto, who ordered the *De Monarchia* to be burnt, and tried his utmost to have the poet's bones disinterred.¹ Such isolated measures as these were, of course, unavailing against the Dante cult at the early period of its great fervour. But the aspect of the question changed completely when the Jesuit power began to take its unparalleled course in the 16th century. With that narrow-mindedness which so often characterised their methods, they saw in Dante only a strenuous opponent to their views of Papal infallibility and kindred doctrines. Besides, one of their chief aims was ever to make all literature Latin, and they felt that their plans must needs be thwarted, if they allowed so mighty a work in the vulgar tongue to run the land unchallenged. As a result of their efforts, the number of editions in the 17th and first half of the 18th centuries was five, and that of commentators nil—figures which become all the more astounding when we consider the enormous amount of manuscripts, editions, and commentaries of the preceding centuries. If yet more tangible proof

¹ The veracity of Boccaccio's account has been proved in the *Studi e polemiche dantesche* of Guerrini and Ricci, pp. 71-92.

were needed of the fear the Jesuits had of Dante, and of the harm he might do them, we need only mention the well-known fact that the *De Monarchia* was put on the Index. The Inquisition did not venture to condemn the entire *Commedia*, but prohibited a few passages only, which would probably have been multiplied if the authorities had been better acquainted with the work. That this same spirit had its sway until comparatively recent times, is proved by the commentary of Venturi, by the attitude of Bettinelli, and by the slighting neglect of Tiraboschi, who has usually more to say on subjects less worthy of attention.¹ But all these schemes and machinations were of no avail. A voice so mighty as that of Dante will be sure to be heard in the end, and no intrigues will be able to stifle its powerful note.

If we continue our survey, and glance rapidly at the various religious schools in Europe during the present century, we see that they are all of them, to a certain extent, due to the revived interest in mediævalism—a phenomenon which was also to exercise a great influence on literature

¹ All these men were Jesuits: it is interesting to note that the first modern Dante commentator favourable to his poet was the Franciscan Lombardi, and even he had to be careful for fear of offending in high quarters.

and art. Accordingly it may be instructive in this place briefly to review the causes which led to the sudden study of the "Dark Ages." The so-called "Gothic Revival," which was one of the main factors, is of special and direct importance for the Catholic movements that are to be noted almost simultaneously in the various countries of Europe. The cathedrals, most wonderful of all the wonders of the Middle Ages, that had throughout the centuries been the admiration of the people—in this case, as so often, the most unerring judges—at last began to attract the attention of the cultured few.¹ Soon after, and in intimate connection with this new phase, came a passion for external form of worship: the most enlightened religious thinkers felt that something sensual, pleasing to ear and eye, was necessary to counteract the scepticism

¹ It may be a mere fancy on our part, but we have, in this connection, always attached importance to the fact that almost every writer who has during the present century occupied himself seriously with Dante, has seen his way to comparing the *Commedia* to a Gothic Cathedral. We do not wish to say that any very deep inference may be drawn from this, nor is this the place to discuss the question as to how far the comparison may be justified. All we would draw attention to is a certain instinctive grouping together, in men's minds, of the two greatest artistic products of the Middle Ages.

and unbelief of the 18th and of the present century. But they did not stop here: they saw that their generation was lacking in all that mystical faith which attained its most perfect development during the Middle Ages. Let us hear one of them, perhaps the greatest, certainly the most earnest of them all: "I will not shrink from uttering my firm conviction, that it would be a gain to this country were it vastly more superstitious, more bigoted, more gloomy, more fierce in its religion than at present it shows itself to be. Not, of course, that I think the temper of mind herein implied desirable, which would be an evident absurdity; but I think them infinitely more desirable and more promising than a heathen obduracy, and a cold, self-sufficient, self-wise tranquillity." Cardinal Newman, the writer of these words, was one of the most zealous promoters of the study of the Fathers in this country, and it was not long before St. Thomas and scholasticism, and then Dante, who summed up the essence of all this thought, riveted the reverent gaze of seriously thinking men. It was but natural that what had been scoffed at by a Voltaire should now be elevated to a seat of glory.

In turning to the religious revival in England, which culminated in the Oxford movement, we are

at once struck by the fact that some of the great leaders were ardent students of our poet. We could quote numerous passages from Keble testifying not only to an acquaintance with Dante's works, but to an appreciation which can come from sympathy alone. Cardinal Manning's veneration for the great Florentine is evidenced by the following words: "There are three works which always seem to me to form a triad of Dogma, of Poetry, and of Devotion—the *Summa* of St. Thomas, the *Divina Commedia*, and the *Paradisus Animæ*. All three contain the same outline of the Faith. St. Thomas traces it on the intellect, Dante upon the imagination, and the *Paradisus Animæ* upon the heart. The poem unites the book of Dogma and the book of Devotion, clothed in conceptions of intensity and beauty which have never been surpassed or equalled. No uninspired hand has ever written thoughts so high, in words so resplendent, as the last stanza of the *Divina Commedia*. It was said of St. Thomas: *Post Summam Thomæ nihil restat nisi lumen gloriæ*. It may be said of Dante: *Post Dantis Paradisum nihil restat nisi visio Dei*."¹

In Germany we note a curious and highly

¹ From the commendatory letter prefaced to Bowden's translation of Hettinger.

interesting spirit of Catholicism pervading the Romantic movement, of which we shall speak when we come to deal with literature. And then we have the school that goes by the name of "Alt-Katholiken." Only a superficial perusal of the writings of their great leader, Ignatius Döllinger, shows us a mind thoroughly impregnated with the Tuscan's work. His Dante studies may be said to have extended throughout his whole career, for in the year 1830 appeared the sympathetic introduction to Cornelius' *Umrisse zum Paradies*, and in 1887 he read the paper *Dante als Prophet* before the Munich Academy. With the same indomitable energy as his master, Döllinger struggled against the temporal power of the Pope. Had Dante lived in this century he would, without a doubt, have joined his trumpet voice to that of the "Alt-Katholiken" against the new dogma of Papal infallibility.

It is more difficult to treat the question as regards France, as several of the most important leaders there showed a spirit so fickle and vacillating, that it is hard to gather what they really aimed at, and how far they were sincere in what they wrote. Rivarol's words, prefixed to his translation of the *Inferno*, must be regarded as singularly prophetic—and not for France alone: "Si jamais, ce qu'il n'est pas permis de croire, notre théologie devenait

une langue morte, et s'il arrivoit qu'elle obtint, comme la mythologie, les honneurs de l'antique, alors le Dante inspireroit une autre espèce d'intérêt : . . . on se feroit chrétien avec le Dante, comme on se fait païen avec Homère." The Liberal Catholics, indeed, derived many of their doctrines and tendencies from the great Italian. Let us begin with two men who eventually strayed from the flock, though not until they had exercised a deep and lasting influence. Lamartine was first hailed with enthusiasm by the party, and to this period belong his memorable words : " Dante semble le poète de notre époque," &c.¹ But gradually his religious fervour abated, and he finally turned his attention to politics alone. It is interesting to note that his enthusiasm for the poet gradually diminished, in proportion as his religious views became more unsettled. He had surely reached the lowest ebb, when he could bring himself to call the *Comedy* "une gazette florentine, une chronique rimée."² The other stray sheep was Lamennais. In the *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* (1817-1823), he acknowledged Papal supremacy much in the same way as Dante; but his theories became more and more democratic, and when the Pope

¹ *Discours de réception.* ² *Cours familier de littérature.*

finally condemned them, Lamennais turned against him. The *Paroles d'un Croyant*, though manifestly inspired by Dante in form, only partly breathe his spirit. However, we are told in his biography that he was always very fond of reading Dante with his disciples; and, that he remained faithful to his veneration for the poet to the end is attested by the translation he made during the last years of his life, in the introduction to which he gives vent to his feelings of disappointment. Lamennais was assisted in the editing of his journal, *L'Avenir*, by Montalembert and Lacordaire, the former of whom is interesting to us chiefly on account of the part Dante plays in his *Histoire des moines d'occident*, the latter on account of his relations with Frédéric Ozanam.¹ This man, one of the most ardent and sincere of the French Liberal Catholics, was, at the same time, one of the greatest Dante scholars of all times, and strongly influenced by the Florentine throughout his life. We might cite numerous examples from his delightful correspondence, to show how his mind was ever filled with his favourite

¹ Thus he writes to Ozanam in 1839: "J'ai vu annoncer dans *l'Univers*, que nous recevons la réimpression de votre Dante; cela m'a fait plaisir. Il faut se garder de quitter la plumes. Écrivons, non pour la gloire, non pour l'immortalité, mais pour Jésus Christ," &c.

poet, and turned to him at every opportunity. Thus he writes in one of his last letters, addressed to Ampère (June, 1853): "Assurément à Pise, j'ai eu des jours assez mauvais pour rêver un prochain repos sous les dalles de marbre de ce beau lieu, et peut-être aurais-je trouvé assez de protecteurs pour obtenir une petite place en échange de l'amour que je porte à l'Italie et à son poète souverain :

Vagliami il lungo studio e il grande amore
Che mi ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.

Mais jusqu'ici je n'ai pas eu lieu de briguer cet excès d'honneur." The occasion was to present itself all too soon, for Ozanam died in the same year.—This correspondence is full of interest for us, as it introduces us to many of the leading Frenchmen of the time, who were distinguished in the most varied walks of life, sympathising with the movement, and, often too, with Ozanam's Dante studies. We see the tender friendship between him and Ampère, another famous Dante enthusiast, and sometimes we come across names we would hardly have expected. Thus Victor Cousin writes in 1840: "J'ai reçu quelques jours après votre Dante. . . . Dites-moi ce que vous faites, vos travaux, vos affaires," &c.

More interesting still, as giving proof of a kind of fellow-feeling between these religious workers and the Italian religious patriots, is the letter from Silvio Pellico (1839). He praises Ozanam for his work, and tells him that he is sending him a copy of Balbo's *Vita* at the author's instigation. These two names may serve as a keynote to the Italian movement, which breathed a religious as well as a patriotic spirit.

There has been endless discussion and controversy as to how far Dante may be considered to have influenced the Italian struggle for liberty.¹ Carlyle represents the view now generally held, in the following passage that closes his extremely suggestive lecture on *The Hero as Poet* (delivered in May, 1840):

“ Yes, truly, it is a great thing for a Nation that it get an articulate voice ; that it produce a man who will speak-forth melodiously what the heart of it means ! Italy, for example, poor Italy lies dismembered, scattered asunder, not appearing in any protocol or treaty as a unity at all ; yet the noble

¹ We may instance Witte's *Dante und die italienischen Fragen*, answered by Herman Grimm (*Neue Essays über Kunst und Literatur*), to which there was another reply forthcoming from Witte. The latter's papers may be read most conveniently in the second volume of the *Dante-Forschungen*.

Italy is actually *one*: Italy produced its Dante; Italy can speak! . . . The Nation that has a Dante is bound together as no dumb Russia can be."

However, we prefer to let the patriots in question speak for themselves; surely they must have known best what they felt and who inspired their feelings. We cannot select a better example than Mazzini, founder of the secret *Società della giovine Italia*. His *Essay on the Minor Works of Dante* is, in our estimation, a document the importance of which it is impossible to overrate in connection with this question. "The Thought that burned within the soul of Dante," he says, "is the same that ferments in the bosom of our own epoch. Every instinct within us points to this truth. It is for this reason that we gather with new earnestness around his image, as if to place our wavering belief beneath the protection of the vast wings of his genius." He asserts that the "general idea" for which Dante fought is the same as was occupying him and his friends. Of the people who ignore Dante's "National Faith," he holds that they "would see no poetry in Moses ascending Mount Sinai amid the storm, to bring down laws for his people." He argues that Dante strove for National Unity, inasmuch as "beyond Clement V. and Henry VII. he saw the unity of the world, and

the moral government of that unity in the hands of Italy ;” and he adds with much truth : “ In his poem he flagellates all the Italian cities, (whether Guelph or Ghibelline), without regard or fear ; Italy alone is sacred to him, and if he reproves or reproaches her, you feel that his reproaches are mingled with tears, aspiration, and a gigantic pride of country.” And finally we will quote the following pregnant words : “ The ideas, of which I have here given you a sketch, are fermenting, more or less boldly developed, among the youth of Italy. Understanding Dante better than the men who write about him, they revere him as the prophet of the nation, and as the one who gave to Italy not only the sceptre of modern poetry, but the initiative thought of a new philosophy.”

Mazzini always fought for the principle, which he had doubtless inherited from Dante, that literature must aim at being useful, and not merely beautiful in form and expression.¹ And this idea struck root in the Italian literature of the period

¹ Already Boccaccio had recognised Dante's claims to precedence in this respect : “ But, besides the sacred poem, he left behind him the example by which, after the name of poetry, that had long been in disrepute, had been by him restored to honour and more widely diffused, those who wished could learn from the new poet what poetry really means, and what are its functions and its aims.” (Letter to Jacob Pizinge.)

in a manner altogether unprecedented since the appearance of the *Commedia*. We need only name Antonio Rosmini, Vincenzo Gioberti, Giovambattista Niccolini, and Niccolò Tommasèo, as representing almost every field of thought. These writers were, one and all, Dante enthusiasts, and quoted and called on their Master whenever the occasion presented itself.

Manzoni would be one of the most fascinating figures to study closely from this point of view. Brought up in Paris, in the midst of a society consisting for the most part of Freethinkers, such as Volney, who can tell what it was that effected so complete a revolution in his thoughts, that made him capable of giving to the world the *Inni Sacri*? Was it only the influence of his wife? At any rate we would not hesitate in ascribing Manzoni's grand conception of the duties of a man of letters to the poet he worshipped throughout his life. For surely the novel *I Promessi Sposi*, by laying bare the evils following in the wake of foreign tyranny, was intended by its author to demonstrate to his oppressed countrymen how ineffably great are the blessings of liberty!

Leopardi represents the universal instinctive reverence paid to Dante by all the greatest of his age, when he turns to him as to a seer, and as to one incarnating a patriot's best and noblest feelings:

. . . O glorioso spirito,
 Dimmi : d' Italia tua morto è l' amore ?
 Di : quella fiamma che t'accese, è spenta ?
 Di : nè più mai rinverdirà quel mirto
 Ch' allegiò per gran tempo il nostro male ?
 Nostre corone al suol fien tutte sparte ?
 Nè sorgerà mai tale
 Che ti rassembri in qualsivoglia parte ?

\ *Sopra il monumento di Dante.*

It is significant for our purpose that so many of the prominent exiles were ardent students of Dante. The names of Mazzini, Foscolo, and the elder Rossetti will at once occur to us. Russell Lowell says of them : " Infinitely touching and sacred to us is the instinct which draws these latter (the exiles) towards their great forerunner, 'exul immeritus,' like themselves."

We have as yet all but neglected mentioning one of the chief instruments on which Dante relied for the realisation of his patriotic plans—we allude to the general diffusion of the "vulgar tongue."¹ Here, again, we may adduce the

¹ Lest any one should feel inclined to dispute Dante's claims to being the first influential poet in the vulgar tongue—and the view might appear to be, to a certain extent, justified, if we consider the Sicilian and later love-poets, especially Guido Guinicelli, who was the chief precursor of the *dolce stil nuovo*, and to whom Dante himself pays a high tribute in *Purg.* xxvi. 97-99—we again quote a decisive passage from Boccaccio to support our view : " He was the

welcome testimony of Mazzini. He says that in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* "Dante attacks all the Italian dialects, but it is because he intends to found a language common to all Italy, to create a form worthy of representing the National Idea."—However, he was impelled to use his native tongue by yet another motive, distinctly modern in spirit, by his "pronta liberalità," as he calls it himself. His aim was to give "useful things to many." (*Conv.* i. 8.) With Albert and St. Thomas, scholasticism had reached its culminating point, and now nothing remained but to make the triumphant system more widely known. Some methods had, it is true, already been invented for facilitating the study of philosophy, but these were, after all, not intended for laymen. It is clear that popularising in the true sense of the word can be effected only by speaking to the people in their own language, and this was Dante's work—for such efforts as those of Brunetto Latini cannot be held of much account, save for the age that produced them. Probably in order to attract some who might otherwise have held aloof, he clothed what would doubtless have become a universal encyclopædia, in the guise of a commentary to some of his first to elevate vulgar poetry among us Italians, and to raise it to a position of honour, just as Homer and Virgil did with theirs among the Greeks and Latins." (*Vita.*)

most popular Canzoni. After writing the *Convito*, Dante embodied all the most essential points of the scholastic philosophy in the *Commedia*, where they were destined for the first time to appeal to the popular imagination. What grand use, for example, has been made of the circles of Paradise, the descriptions of which in the folios of the schoolmen, and even in the *Convito*, are comparatively so unconvincing and devoid of interest! And in the realms of theology we would draw special attention to a point which has been touched by Dean Milman¹ with great penetration: "Christendom owes to Dante the creation of Italian poetry, through Italian, of Christian poetry. It required all the courage, firmness, and prophetic sagacity of Dante to throw aside the inflexible bondage of the established hierarchical Latin of Europe. Perhaps Dante, the Italian, the Ghibelline, the assertor of the universal temporal monarchy, dwelt not less fondly in his imagination on this universal and noble Italian language, because it would supersede the Papal and hierarchical Latin; the Latin, with the Pope himself, would withdraw into the sanctuary, into the service of the Church, into affairs purely spiritual."

Not content with proving to all the world the fitness of the Italian tongue as a literary vehicle by

¹ *Latin Christianity*, ix. 198.

the practical example of his own work, Dante planned a theoretical exposition of this fact in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. The modern student of Romance philology, who naturally regards Dante as the centre of all his studies, must feel a special satisfaction in being able to date the commencement of his science from the appearance of this work, which is conceived and executed quite in the modern scientific spirit. Dante himself begins by telling us that he is the first to treat the subject; the whole passage, which also contains his reasons for doing so, shows us a mind so wonderfully in advance of his age, that we give it in full: "As I cannot find that any one has, before me, treated the vulgar speech theoretically; and as I see that this speech is truly necessary for all, since not alone men, but also women and little children, as far as Nature permits, strive to attain it; and, finally, as it is my wish to enlighten the intellect of those who go over the public places like blind men, mostly thinking that that comes before which in reality comes after: accordingly, with the aid of the Divine Word from heaven, I shall attempt to be of service to the speech used by ordinary people."—It is interesting to trace the history and influence of the treatise. Its author was the first to direct attention to the

necessity of having a fixed standard of language, which was to consist of the cream of all the dialects. And, as was to be expected, the treatise has, since its discovery, been constantly made use of in the controversy, which has never ceased in Italy, as to which of the dialects was entitled to the supremacy. At the beginning of the 16th century there was a natural reaction against the classics, and then men turned their eyes to the great Triumvirate of the 14th century, as supplying the best examples of every species of literary style. This led to a heated discussion as to the dialect which might claim the distinction of having given birth to the language. The Florentines, Pietro Bembo among the number, naturally upheld the right of the Tuscan, but the literary men of Northern Italy thought otherwise. To these belonged Castiglione, Muzio, and above all Trissino, who brought fresh fuel to the dispute by the discovery and publication of Dante's old treatise (1529), after it had been hidden away for more than two hundred years. Now they had the greatest authority to support their view of the question—namely, that the supreme dialect must be a conglomeration of all. At this stage a most salutary change was effected by the efforts of such men as Bembo, Castelvetro, and Salviati to set up a fixed

standard for a national tongue, which was, of course, based on the works of the *Trecentisti*. And in the present century we find the strife continued between the Tuscan *Puristi* such as Antonio Cesari, who again claimed the supremacy, and the Lombards, who were headed by Vincenzo Monti and Giulio Perticari. The latter in their *Proposta* (1817-26) made use of the same arguments as Trissino, and drew largely on the *Eloquentia*. And then we have the final great discussion on the subject, in which Manzoni, Bonghi, Capponi, Giuliani, Capitani, Fanfani, Scarabelli, and others took part. Here, as in the other cases, Dante was the centre from which all the arguments radiated.

Dante's determination to employ the vulgar tongue must appear all the more extraordinary when we see how his contemporaries and many succeeding generations abused him for what we now feel to have been a decision full of the wisest forethought. Thus in the 15th and 16th centuries we might quote interesting examples from the works of Poggio and Paolo Cortese; and more characteristic still are the Latin translations of the *Commedia* which appeared about this time, assuredly one of the most curious phenomena in literary history! After these instances, drawn from later ages, it can no longer astonish us, when we

read in Boccaccio's *Vita* that in his time many, "and among them wise men," wondered why Dante had not written in Latin.¹

But while our poet recognised the importance of a national language and literature, he was at the same time keenly alive to the necessity of classical studies for all who would attain proficiency in their own tongue. The perfect form of the *Commedia*, and above all the style, which Macaulay with reason called "unmatched," are the first fruits of classical studies in modern Europe. A nation that had been trained to understand and relish such a work could turn with comparative ease to the study of the classics when the time came for their revival. It is needless to dwell on the importance of the part Virgil plays in the economy of the poem. Though we still find traces of the conception the Middle Ages had formed of him, yet Dante was the first to admire the poet in him rather than the magician; he knew how much he owed to him, and his gratitude was unbounded:

Tu se' lo mio maestro e il mio autore :

Tu se' solo colui, da cui io tolsi

Lo bello stile che mi ha fatto onore.—*Inf.* i. 85.

¹ Cf. also the Latin Eclogue addressed to Dante by Giovanni del Virgilio.

We feel that it is principally through Dante's instrumentality that Virgil's figure has held such a prominent place in European letters and thought ever since the 14th century. The following suggestive words are from a speech of Carducci's delivered in 1888: "Gloriamoci—e non è poco—altamente, sinceramente e securamente—gloriamoci che Dante è il maestro nostro ed il padre nella conservazione della tradizione romana al rinnovamento d'Italia." That Dante derived this Roman tradition from Virgil, and was conscious that he had done so, is clear from the allegorical part he assigns the Latin poet in the *Commedia*. Russell Lowell speaks somewhere in a different connection of the "influence which made Virgil through Dante a main factor in the revival of Italy."¹—It would be idle to deny that Virgil played by far the most prominent part in Dante's classical studies. At the same time his works show a considerable knowledge of Ovid and, in a lesser degree, of Lucan, Statius, and Cicero.² *We hold, then, that Dante was the first Humanist.* For, if we leave aside Petrarch for the present, we hear from the lips of

¹ *Works*, vi. 227.

² The Greek philosophy Dante, of course, received only at second hand, after it had filtered through endless translations and distortions.

the more candid and generous Boccaccio that Dante was "the first guide and the first torch" in his studies. These words¹ are for us fraught with the deepest significance, for they undoubtedly refer in the first place to classical studies, and, while Boccaccio is generally admitted to have been one of the forerunners of the Classical Renaissance, Dante is scarcely ever mentioned in connection with it. Surely it was in the traces of Dante that Boccaccio, Benvenuto da Imola, Jacopo della Lana, Buti, and the other commentators and lecturers, together with their readers and hearers, were first initiated into their studies of classical antiquity; and not of this alone. Theology, philosophy, history, biography, astronomy, physics, philology, law, politics—in short, the whole of Dante's vast encyclopædic range of subject had to be mastered by them, as they have to be mastered by us.

Let us, for a moment, extend our view from the immediate subject in hand, and try to gauge the importance of Dante's educational influence from the following passage by Russell Lowell. It is re-

¹ We have them only on the indirect testimony of Petrarch's well-known letter in answer to Boccaccio's lines conjuring him to study Dante; but, from the context, we may assume with certainty that the phrase, or one to the same effect, was contained in a letter of Boccaccio's accompanying these lines, and now lost.

markable to hear the great modern scholar almost repeat the words that Boccaccio wrote five hundred years ago, and Lowell is assuredly not the only one to whom they may be applied :¹

“One is sometimes asked by young men to recommend to them a course of reading. My advice would always be to confine yourselves to the supreme books in whatever literature ; still better, to choose some one great author and grow thoroughly familiar with him. For as all roads lead to Rome, so they all likewise lead thence ; and you will find that in order to understand perfectly and weigh exactly any really vital piece of literature, you will be gradually and pleasantly persuaded to studies and explorations of which you little dreamed when you began, and will find yourselves scholars before you are aware. *If I may be allowed a personal illustration, it was my own profound admiration for the Divina Commedia of Dante that lured me into what little learning I possess.* For remember that there is nothing less fruitful than scholarship for the sake of mere

¹ Mr. Norton quoted the passage from an unpublished college lecture, at the 11th Annual Meeting of the Cambridge (Mass.) Dante Society, in a speech deploring the loss of the lately deceased President. It was published for the first time in the 11th Annual Report of the Society (Cambridge, Mass., 1892).

scholarship, nor anything more wearisome in the attainment. But the moment you have an object and a centre, attention is quickened, the mother of memory ; and whatever you acquire groups and arranges itself in an order which is lucid because it is everywhere in intelligent relation to an object of constant and growing interest. Thus, as respects Dante, I asked myself, What are his points of likeness or unlikeness with the authors of classical antiquity? In how far is either of these an advantage or defect? What and how much modern literature had preceded him? How much was he indebted to it? How far had the Italian language been subdued and suppld to the uses of poetry or prose before his time? How much did he color the style or thought of the authors who followed him? Is it a fault or a merit that he is so thoroughly impregnated with the opinions, passions, and even prejudices not only of his age, but his country? Was he right or wrong in being a Ghibelline? To what extent is a certain freedom of opinion which he shows sometimes on points of religious doctrine to be attributed to the humanizing influence of the Crusades in enlarging the horizon of the western mind by bringing it in contact with other races, religions, and social arrangements? These and a hundred other such

questions were constant stimulants to thought and inquiry, stimulants such as no merely objectless and, so to speak, impersonal study could have supplied."

But to return. Every reader of the *Commedia* will be struck by the constant parallelism of its pagan and Christian elements, notably in the *Purgatory*, where the examples for the vices and virtues are drawn from both sources alike. In doing this, Dante was only carrying out his general dual plan of spiritual and temporal power, which dominates the whole work. This by the way. What we desire to show here is, that Dante never allowed his classical tastes to gain the upper hand. Burckhardt remarks, that if there had been a succession of men to carry on Dante's work in his spirit, the absolute classicism of the Renaissance would have been impossible. However, the classics, owing to their novelty, fascinated all alike: even men like Petrarch and Boccaccio, masters as they were of their own national language, were infected by the general fever, and built their hopes of immortality on Latin works that are now never read save by the literary student. And it was just because Dante always assigned the first place to his native idiom, and because it was his constant endeavour to raise it to

the same level with the Latin, that he came to exercise such an incalculable influence on the national literature of his country.—We do not mean a direct influence, for a work such as the *Commedia* cannot be imitated, and must ever remain unique. Even Petrarch's genius could not transfuse Dante's spirit into the *Trionfi*, while Boccaccio's *Innamorata Visione* can scarcely be pronounced worthy of its writer. But these are brilliant efforts compared with such works as Uberti's *Dittamondo* and Frezzi's *Quadiregio*.¹—No, we mean influence in a far wider and grander sense of the word. It would be difficult to name a single poet of real distinction who has not drunk deep and long draughts at this “undefiled well” of Italian poetry.

¹ In other countries we have also undoubted imitations, such as the *Chemin de Long Estude* of Christine de Pisan in France (1402); while England can boast of a whole series, of which the most important are Chaucer's *House of Fame*, Lyndesay's *Dreame*, and Sackville's *Induction*. Of those works which are inspired by single episodes, it may suffice to mention Silvio Pellico's *Francesca*, Sestini's *Pia*, Gerstenberg's *Ugolino*—which derives its chief interest from Lessing's criticism—and Leigh Hunt's *Story of Rimini*. Poems such as Browning's *Sordello* and Tennyson's *Ulysses* belong to yet another category, less directly inspired than the preceding.

Having several times in the course of our remarks had occasion to refer to Petrarch, we would now wish to state our opinion of the relations in which he stood to Dante. He has always been regarded, and with perfect justice, as forming a landmark in the history of European letters and culture. But we cannot help thinking that he owes more to Dante than is generally believed, and than he himself was inclined to concede. If we read the letter to Boccaccio without prejudice, it is impossible not to detect a certain jealousy, which is but lightly veiled by the awkward excuses, that have to our ears a very hollow and insincere ring about them. His words are to the following effect:—If *you* choose to honour Dante, do so by all means, since you acknowledge him as your master. I, for my part, own that I have never seen the *Commedia*, but that is not due to my despising the poem. On the contrary, I have always considered the vulgar speech my highest aim, and, just on that account, wished to preserve my independence in that field. Any similarity in our works must be due to chance.—Now, in spite of continued protestations, such as: “Thus it is: if you are ever to believe me in anything, believe me in this, for I have never spoken more true,” it is hard to take all the

above for gospel. At any rate, there can be no doubt that Boccaccio worked a change for the better in his friend's feelings, and this letter, dated 1359, may be regarded as forming the turning-point in this direction. The *Trionfi* show a close study of the *Commedia*, as even Carducci is willing to admit, whose masterly defence of Petrarch should be read by every one interested in the question.¹ In the same way the political poems and theories of Petrarch, which belong to this later period, are only an outcome of Dante's teaching, though Dante must always move us more than a man like Petrarch, whose character, in the matter of politics, was far from upright and consistent; and that is probably the reason why the Italian patriots of this century almost invariably went back to Dante as a source of encouragement and inspiration. And what about the *Canzoniere*, with which we are chiefly concerned, and to which no mention is made in the letter, not even where the vulgar tongue is spoken of? Carducci's opinion is summed up in the words: "Petrarch from his youth knew Dante as love-poet only too well, and exactly for that reason was afraid of reading the *Commedia*."

We have thought it necessary to dwell at such

¹ In the Florentine *Nuova Antologia*, v. pp. 22-54 (1867).

length on this point, because we are about to enter the domain of love-literature, where Petrarch's sway has been admittedly unequalled. But here, too, we intend to insist on our theory, and are glad, this time, to have the support of several able writers—among others, that of the distinguished lady who writes under the *nom de plume* of Vernon Lee.¹ It is needless, in this place, to point out the characteristics that distinguished the Provençal, Sicilian, and Tuscan schools of love-poetry. Young Henry Hallam sums up the leading facts with sufficient clearness when he says of the Tuscan poetry and poets:² "Its base is undoubtedly the troubadour poetry (of which he had already spoken), but on this they have reared a splendid edifice of Platonism, and surmounted it with the banner of the Cross." The Provençals, the Sicilians, and after them Guittone d'Arezzo, Guinicelli, Cino da Pistoja, and Cavalcanti, had cultivated the amorous poetry till it had attained a singular perfection of form and expression. But it lacked the one essential quality without which

¹ "Mediæval Love." (*Euphorion*.)

² In the oration on the *Influence of Italian works of the Imagination, on the same class of composition in England*, delivered in the Chapel of Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1831.

lyrical poetry must ever be a mere skeleton without flesh and blood. We have in the *Comedy* an inimitable passage, in which Dante, with his usual self-consciousness, shows us that he was well aware of his superiority over his predecessors and contemporaries, and of the cause of this superiority. One of the love-poets, Bonagiunta da Lucca, says to him:

“Ma di’ s’io veggio qui colui che fuore
Trasse le nuove rime cominciando :
‘Donne, ch’ avete intelletto d’ Amore.’”
Ed io a lui : “*Io mi son un che, quando
Amor mi spira, noto, ed a quel modo
Che dètta dentro, vo significando.*”
“O frate, issa veggio, disse, il nodo
Che il Notaro e Guittone e me ritenne
Di qua dal dolce stil nuovo ch’ i’ odo.
Io veggio ben come le vostre penne
Diretro al dittator sen vanno strette,
Che delle nostre certo non avvenne ;
E qual più a riguardar oltre si mette,
Non vede più dall’ uno all’ altro stilo :”
E quasi contentato si tacette.—*Purg.* xxiv. 49.

Dante, then, had discovered the secret, by the aid of which the lyrical poetry of Italy was to attain the highest perfection of which this class of literature is capable, and, through the instrumentality of Petrarch, to exercise such a vast influence on European letters. For we do not wish to

dispute Petrarch's claims to the high honour of having been the direct inspirer of most of the love-poetry of modern Europe. The only point we would insist on is that Petrarch's *Canzoniere* itself, in the shape in which we now possess and admire it, would have been impossible without Dante. We feel that Petrarch was not the man to have been able to pen the "Rime in *morte* di Laura," at any rate, if Dante's spiritual love for Beatrice had not been there to serve him as a guide.¹ We always fancy that, but for this ennobling example, Petrarch would have allowed his distinctly licentious nature to assert itself more freely. The severer spirit breathing from Dante's minor poems is sufficient to account for their having had to yield the palm in popular favour to those of the later poet, even at a period when the *Commedia* was still exercising its full sway.

It is needless to trace the history of this love-poetry. In Italy we shall only pause for a moment at the grand figure of Michelangelo, who took Dante as his model here as in so many points. In the great artist's noble sonnets we hear Dante's

¹ "Dante understood the secret things of love even more than Petrarch. His *Vita Nuova* is an inexhaustible fountain of purity of sentiment and language." (Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*.)

voice in every line—the same expressions, the same allegory, the same gloomy tone. — We shall pass over the *Pléiade* in France, and the sonnets of Wyatt, Surrey, Spenser, and Shakespeare in England.¹ However, we would point out that the *Hymns in Honour of Love and Beauty* still bear so many signs of their primary origin, that those unacquainted with the poetry of Petrarch, to which they undoubtedly owe their direct inspiration, would not hesitate in seeking for their source in the works of Dante.

It is interesting to consider for a moment the most characteristic trait of this old Italian love. Dante regards Love as the origin of all things, good and evil, and sets forth his theory at full length in the 17th canto of the *Purgatory* in the passage closing with these words :

Quinci comprender puoi ch'esser conviene
Amor sementa in voi d'ogni virtute,
E d'ogni operazion che merta pene.

¹ The *Arte of English Poesie* speaks of Wyatt and Surrey as “novices newly crept out of the schooles of Dante, Ariosto, and Petrarch.”—Even Milton, who scarcely belongs in this place, says, speaking of his early partiality for the elegiac poets: “Above them all, I preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but in honour of them to whom they devote their verses, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression.”

This, of course, supplies the idea only in the most general way. Already St. Augustine had said : " Boni aut mali mores, sunt boni aut mali amores." Besides, Boethius, Bonaventura, and others whose writings were known to Dante, have the same idea. Indeed, the elevating influence of love had formed one of the chief themes of the trobadors and their disciples, when Dante came and set the stamp of immortality on this grand conception. And, assuredly, it is not merely a fanciful operation to follow this thought as Vernon Lee has done. Already Chaucer "by the side of the merely mediæval love types—of brutish lust and dog-like devotion—of the wife of Bath and of Griseldis, had attested a kind of modern love, the love that is to become that of Romeo and Hamlet, in his *Palamon and Arcyte*."—It was Shakespeare who saw that an ideal love was only possible by a blending of the more Teutonic passion with the spirit of the Tuscan poetry, under the influence of which he had himself fallen in his youth. And this is the love that the best and greatest of our poets still hold up as the ideal to which all must strive, the love we find in the works of Shelley,¹ the

¹ "Love is celebrated everywhere as the sole law which should govern the moral world." (Preface to *The Revolt of Islam*.)

Brownings, and of Tennyson. It has never found a more noble expression than in the verses in which the late Laureate speaks to us through the mouth of his King Arthur :

I made them lay their hands in mine and swear

.
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her ; for indeed I knew
Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words,
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.

It goes without saying that such a passion as that of Dante for Beatrice was significant not for these two alone, but for the *cuori gentili* of all times. The touching love-story, that approaches the ideal as nearly as is possible on this earth of ours—we mean, of course, as far as Dante's part in it is concerned—has become a household word in every country, and as long as writers and poets continue to fan the flame, it will remain to serve as an eternal type for emulation. We may select two instances, perfectly at random. The hero of

Valera's *Pepita Jimenez*, tied by his priest's vows, at one time thought of making his beloved "a symbol, an allegory, an image of all that is good, of all that is beautiful. She shall be to me, as Beatrice was to Dante, the image and the symbol of country, of knowledge, and of beauty."—More interesting, because taken from real life, is the youthful confession of the passion-tost Sainte-Beuve, who addresses his friend, Antony Deschamps, in words that will find an echo in many hearts :

Que n'ai-je eu de bonne heure un ange dans ma vie ?
 Que n'ai-je aussi réglé l'œuvre de chaque jour,
 Chaque songe de nuit, sur un céleste amour ?
 On ne me verrait pas, sans but et sans pensée,
 Tout droit, tous les matins, sortir, tête baissée ;
 Rôder le long des murs où vingt fois j'ai heurté,
 Traînant honteusement mon génie avorté.
 Le génie est plus grand, aidé d'un cœur plus sage.

And then, after a remarkably fine translation from the *Vita Nuova* :

Ainsi son jeune amour était pour Dante enfant
 Un monde au fond de l'âme, un soleil échauffant,
 Un poème éternel. . . .
 Que n'ai-je eu, comme lui, mes amours à neuf ans ?

 Qui sait ? ma Béatrix n'était pas loin peut-être.

Et mon cœur aura fui trop tôt pour la connaître !
 Hélas ! c'est que j'étais déjà ce que je suis ;
 Être faible, inconstant, qui veut et qui ne puis.
 Comprenant par accès la Beauté sans modèle,
 Mais tiède, et la servant d'une âme peu fidèle.
 C'est que je suis d'argile et de larmes pétri ;
 C'est que le pain des forts ne m'a jamais nourri ;
 Et que, dès le matin, pèlerin sans courage,
 J'accuse tour à tour le soleil et l'orage ;
 C'est qu'un rien me distrait ; c'est que je suis mal né,
 Qu'aux limbes d'ici-bas justement condamné,
 Je m'épuise à gravir la colline bénie,
 Où siège Dante, où vout ses pareils en génie.

What makes the example of Sainte-Beuve so interesting is that it was actually the love-element in Dante's life and works that first attracted the young man :

Dante est un puissant maître, à l'allure hardie,
 Dont j'adore à genoux l'étrange *Comédie* ;
 Mais le sentier est rude et tourne à l'infini,
 Et j'attends, pour monter, notre guide Antony.
 Le plus court me va mieux ;—aussi la simple histoire
 Où, de sa Béatrix recueillant la mémoire,
 Il revient pas à pas sur cet amour sacré,
 Est ce que j'ai de lui jusqu'ici préféré.
 Plus j'y reviens, et plus j'honore le poète, &c.

Here, again, it is only natural to suppose that Sainte-Beuve is but one of a large class for whom

the *Vita Nuova* formed, as it were, the stepping-stone to the study of the greater work. Sometimes, indeed, the disciples of the great Tuscan never ceased to find their chief delight in this exquisite production of his youth: among these Dante Gabriel Rossetti occupies the place of honour.¹

Dante's general influence on literature is perhaps unsurpassed, for, always appreciated by the master-poets of Italy, he has, since the end of the last century, become the object of passionate study on the part of the master-poets of Europe. His marvellous style, his manifold exquisite images and similes, have become a never-failing source of inspiration.²

¹ See *inter alia* the sonnet *Dantis Tenebræ* (In memory to my father):

And didst thou know, indeed, when at the font
 Together with my name thou gav'st me his,
 That also on thy son must Beatrice
 Decline her eyes according to her wont,
 Accepting me to be of those that haunt
 The vale of magical dark mysteries
 Where to the hills her poet's foot-track lies,
 And wisdom's living fountain to his chaunt
 Trembles in music? &c.

² A good example is the description at the beginning of *Purg.* xxviii., of which Ruskin says: "The tender lines which tell of the voices of the birds mingling with the wind, and of the leaves all turning one way before it, have been

While we find echoes of Dante's poem throughout the whole of Italian literature, it is not till the end of the last century that the writers came to be deeply imbued with his spirit. We have mentioned Varano as having given a strong impetus towards this state of things. Then came Parini, whose beautiful style and austerity of thought are modelled on those of Dante, and after him, more important still, Alfieri, whose intense study of the poet convinced him that the Italian language was far from being as effeminate as most of the contemporary dramatic literature would have led one to suppose. The result of these studies he laid down in his tragedies, which so often breathe the sternness and severity of Dante's manner. Most of the names we have noted in a different

more or less copied by every poet since Dante's time. They are, so far as I know, the sweetest passage of wood-description which exists in literature" (*Mod. Painters*, iii. 219).—The imitations have of course not always been successful, and cases of injudicious plagiarism have often been noted. We need only remind the reader of Dante's *A guisa di leon quando si posa*, or his *Che paia il giorno pianger che si muore*, and of Tasso's and Gray's imitations of these lines. It is also instructive to compare *Ger. Lib.* xiii. 60 with *Inf.* xxx. 64, and *Orl. Fur.* vi. 27 and xxviii. 90, with *Inf.* xiii. 40 and *Purg.* vi. 149. Finally we will mention the numerous reminiscences in Pulci, which are of course burlesque.

connection might be cited again in this place : Foscolo, Giusti, Leopardi, Manzoni ; and to these we may add Carducci to represent the living. Monti is an instructive example, as proving how irresistible Dante's power was even over natures so entirely different to his. Surely Cantù is right when he says : " Mentre Dante diceva : ' Quando amore spira, noto,' il Monti professa : ' Ho amato per passione ed ho amato per capriccio ; ed in tutte due le circostanze, ho composto de' versi.' " And yet his writings—we need only name the *Bassvilliana*—testify to so deep a study of Dante, that the Florentine must be admitted to have strongly influenced his intellect, though he did not penetrate to his heart.

There are qualities in Dante which could not but endear him to the followers of all the so-called Romantic schools. His mediæval spirit, his disregard for all conventionality, his aim to make the imaginative faculty in poetry subservient to reason, to geometrical precision—these, and so many other attributes, were quite in the spirit of the modern movements. And this accounts for the enthusiasm with which he was greeted not by Manzoni and his fellow-workers alone, but also across the Alps. In Germany he shares the chief honours with Shakespeare, Petrarch, Cervantes, and Calderon.

A. W. von Schlegel calls him his "favourite poet" (*Werke*, iii. p. 199), and though he probably modified his opinion later on in favour of Shakespeare, yet he never ceased to urge his friends and the general public to a study of the *Commedia*. From the date of the appearance of Schlegel's translation of extracts from this work (1791), we may trace the influence of the form and spirit of Dante's poetry in German literature. Friedrich Schlegel looked upon him as forming with Shakespeare and Goethe the "grosse Dreiklang der modernen Poesie, der innerste und allerheiligste Kreis unter allen engern und weitem Sphären der kritischen Auswahl der Classiker der neueren Dichtkunst."¹ Tieck regarded Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Goethe as the "heiligen Meister der neuen Kunst."²—And let us revert for a moment to the spirit of Catholicism which made itself so deeply felt in the movement, that several of its leaders, such as F. Schlegel, Zacharias Werner and Novalis went over to the Church of Rome. We probably have to seek for the explanation of the religious waverings of these men in the romantic love of things mediæval, which was fostered and kept alive by their continued study of our poet.—Perhaps the most lasting monument

¹ *Athenäum*, i. 2, 68.

² *Zerbino*, act v.

of the force with which the current of Dante's sway made itself felt at this time in Germany, is the close of the second part of *Faust*, which proves that even Goethe sought for inspiration in the *Commedia*—Goethe, who during his whole life was filled with a kind of antipathy towards the Florentine, that was probably due to his disinclination to subscribe to any particular form of religious belief, and to his having been over-nourished on Ariosto and Tasso in his youth.

It is surprising that Dante should have been for so many centuries scarcely more than a name in Germany, especially when we consider the close relations in which that country stood to Italy at repeated intervals in her history; and the same remark applies with even greater force to France. Rivarol, by his translation of the *Inferno* (1783), was the first to attract general attention to the *Commedia* in that country, and Chateaubriand, though far from appreciating the work at its true value, made the cult general. In the *Génie du Christianisme* Dante is quoted to prove the superiority of Christian over Pagan poets; but, as Sainte-Beuve and others have hinted, he missed one of his most splendid opportunities in his long chain of arguments in favour of Christianity, by not making more elaborate use

of the greatest of all Christian poems. Of Lamartine and the religious literature we have already spoken.—Victor Hugo and his school approached our poet in the proper spirit, and were most lavish in their enthusiasm for his genius. The following passage from the Preface to *Les Rayons et les Ombres* is very remarkable: “Pour ce qui est des questions de style et de forme, il (*i.e.*, the author) n’en parlera point. Les personnes qui veulent bien lire ce qu’il écrit savent depuis longtemps que, s’il admet quelquefois, en de certains cas, le vague et le demi-jour dans la pensée, il les admet plus rarement dans l’expression. Sans méconnaître la grande poésie du Nord représentée en France même par d’admirables poètes, il a toujours eu un goût vif pour la forme méridionale et précise. Il aime le soleil. La Bible est son livre. Virgile et Dante sont ses divins maîtres.”—But it was not merely on the point of style that Dante was a “divine master” for Victor Hugo. In another place (Preface to the *Orientales*), where he compares his ideal of the form of literary compositions to an irregular Spanish town, he complains contemptuously that, while other nations have their Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, the French continue to insist on Boileau. Then there is a whole legion of poems, and portions of poems, in which

Dante, sometimes in company with Isaiah, Juvenal, and the like, is regarded as the scourge of evil, and extolled for his high moral sense, his powers of satire, his fearless scorn and cognate qualities. Foremost among these, by reason of its length, stands the *Vision de Dante* (1883). The Italian poet is made to relate how he has seen the peoples of Europe, torn by wars, before the archangel in Heaven. They begin by accusing the devastating armies, but the blame is made to rest with the generals, the judges, and the kings in turn, and finally, of course, with the Pope. The closing lines of this powerful poem are as follows :

Et, comme je fuyais, dans la nuée ardente
 Une face apparut et me cria : Mon Dante,
 Prends ce pape qui fit le mal et non le bien,
 Mets-le dans ton enfer, je le mets dans le mien.

Hugo rightly regarded Dante as having hated all evil, not only evil in high places :

Oh ! ces Dantes géants, ces vastes Isaïes !
 Ils frappent les fronts vils et les têtes haïes ;
 Ils ont pour loi punir, trancher, supplicier ;
 Ils ont la probité sinistre de l'acier ;
 Nul homme n'est plus grand sous le ciel solitaire
 Que ces archanges froids et tristes de la terre ;
 Ils sont les punisseurs ; &c. . . .

La Pitié Suprême, i.

One of the most terrible warnings is that given to the man *qui a livré une femme* (in the *Chants du Crépuscule*).¹

At other times Dante appears as the great poet of liberty :

France . . .

Tu crieras : Liberté ! Paix ! Clémence ! Espérance !

Eschyle dans Athènes et Dante dans Florence

S'accorderont au bord du tombeau, réveillés,

Et te regardant, fiers, joyeux, les yeux mouillés,

Croiront voir l'un la Grèce et l'autre l'Italie.

Année Terrible (Juillet ix.).

In this worship of Dante as the poet and lover of universal liberty, Hugo stands by no means alone in France. Auguste Barbier's poem, entitled *Dante* (one of the *Iambes*, 1831), shows how sympathetic the figure of the great Florentine was to Frenchmen at the period of their revolutions. "Oh, Dante!" he exclaims, "I understand to-day your mortal suffering." Edouard Grenier's *Vision* (1858) is another very beautiful poem, in which the form and manner of Dante are imitated. The poet feigns that he is in the pine-forest of Ravenna, when the shade of Dante appears to him, and, on

¹ Cf. also *Année Terrible* (Octobre ii. and Juin viii.), *Les Quatre Vents de l'esprit* (Le Livre Satirique, i., iii., v. ; Le Livre Lyrique, xliii. and xlvii.), &c. &c.

being questioned as to the fate of France, answers in the parable of Spring and the new birth of Nature, after the hard winter frosts.

Dante undoubtedly exercised a salutary influence in France—a country that had so long lacked true lyrical poets, and was sorely in need of such a stimulus.¹ We have only to read Musset's *Souvenir*, for example, in order to feel that the poets of the school, sufferers themselves, often turn for counsel and solace to the great Italian, and only differed from him with regret. In the present instance the poet cannot subscribe to the famous *Nessun maggior dolore*, and addresses Dante in a tone of reproach mingled with awe, as though in the presence of a master :

Est-ce bien toi, grande âme immortellement triste,
Est-ce toi qui l'as dit ?

And if we turn to the French literature of to-day, with its various schools of *Psychologues*, *Symbolistes*, and the like, we are struck by the fact that they,

¹ Noteworthy, too, on the score of language, are the following words, concerning translations, which occur in Rivarol's Preface : " J'ai donc pensé qu'elles devraient servir également à la gloire du poète qu'on traduit, et au progrès de la langue dans laquelle on traduit."—This idea was repeated by other Dante translators.

too, continue to derive much of their inspiration and support from Dante's works. Let us take up for a moment M. Jules Huret's *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, a book which cannot be too strongly condemned on principle, since it introduces a feature of the "new journalism" into literary criticism, but which must be allowed to contain much of interest for the literary student. Here we are struck by seeing so many of these modern *Symbolistes* and members of cognate schools justifying their views by the example of Dante, who, indeed, appears to have been studied by them only from their particular point of view. Thus we hear from José-Maria de Hérédia: "Dante, que je considère le plus grand de tous les poètes, son poème tout entier n'est qu'un symbole!" Another poet exclaims: "Soyons symbolistes comme Dante. Cultivons le symbolisme sans le rigoriser, ni l'édifier en petite tente sous l'ample soleil artistique."

It is instructive also to study M. Anatole France's essay on M. Maurice Barrès' *Le Jardin de Bérénice*,¹ some of the characteristics of which he compares to the *Vita Nuova*:—"Cette *Vita Nuova*, du moins par sa subtilité, peut, à la rigueur, donner quelque idée de la manière de M. M.

¹ *La vie littéraire*, IV^e série, p. 223.

Barrès qui est, en littérature, un préraphaélite. Et c'est grâce, sans doute, à ce tour de style et d'âme qu'il a séduit M. Paul Bourget ainsi que plusieurs de nos raffinés. L'inertie expressive des figures, la raideur un peu gauche des scènes qui ne sont point liées, les petits paysages exquis tendus comme des tapisseries, c'est ce que j'appelle le préraphaélisme et le florentinisme de M. Maurice Barrès."

A mere glance at the terminology of this extract shows us that our English culture has here been instrumental in spreading Dante's influence abroad.¹ England differs in one important respect from the countries which we have just reviewed, in that two of her greatest poets, the one living in the 14th, the other in the 17th century, and both exercising an enormous influence on their own and succeeding generations, were diligent students of Dante, and transfused into their work much of the form and spirit of the *Commedia*. We cannot propose to enter into details respecting the obligations of Chaucer and Milton to the great Tuscan, and we feel that we may well touch lightly on a point that has been treated by so many competent critics. In reading

¹ It is characteristic that Maeterlinck (in Huret's book) mentions among his favourites Rossetti and Burne-Jones.

the *Canterbury Tales* or *Paradise Lost* we are continually coming across passages which make us stop short, and say to ourselves: "Surely this would have been impossible but for Dante!" Chaucer, in addition to directly imitating whole episodes of the *Comedy*, would appear to have learnt from Dante especially his use of homely similes. However, he did not limit himself to these, and never hesitated to adopt beauties of any kind: thus *all the orient laugheth of the sight* (in the *Knights Tale*) obviously goes back to *Purg.* i. 20. He has expressed his indebtedness in several passages by directly naming his source in his simple way.¹ —Between Dante and Milton a more elaborate parallel might be drawn than has as yet been attempted or than can be attempted in this place, and in view of the undoubted fact that the English poet was thoroughly acquainted with the

¹ For example, at the close of *Hugelin of Pise* in the *Monkes Tale*:

Who-so wol here it in a lenger wyse,
Redeth the grete poete of Itaille,
That highte Dante, for he can al deuyse,
Fro point to point, nat o word wol he faille.

or in the *Wif of Bathes Tale* (where he makes use of *Purg.* vii. 121):

Wel can the wise poete of Florence
That highte Dant, speken of this sentence.

Tuscan's work, some of the points of resemblance at any rate are certainly not due to mere coincidence. We feel that in certain traits of his works,¹ public life, and character, he was strengthened by the example of his forerunner. There are several passages in Milton's writings, notably in the Latin letters, that bear direct and striking testimony to the admiration he felt for the *Commedia* and its author. In the essay *Of Reformation in England*, he even quotes Dante's passages on the "gift of Constantine" in support

¹ The following extract from a letter of Russell Lowell to Mr. Charles Eliot Norton deserves the consideration due to so great an authority: "I read . . . a little of Dante and a great deal of Milton, convincing myself of what I had long taken for granted, that his versification was mainly modelled on the Italian and especially on the *Divina Commedia*. Many, if not most of his odd constructions are to be sought there, I think, rather than in the ancients."—With regard to mythology, we may quote the following from Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*: "The *Divina Commedia* and *Paradise Lost* have conferred upon modern mythology a systematic form; and when change and time shall have added one more superstition to the mass of those which have arisen and decayed upon the earth, commentators will be learnedly employed in elucidating the religion of ancestral Europe, only not utterly forgotten because it will have been stamped with the eternity of genius."—Much the same might be said concerning the poetic use of astronomy.

of his own views on the subject—a proof that he had grasped the importance of Dante's political teaching.

The *Faërie Queene* supplies numerous reminiscences of the *Comedy*,¹ though its author was naturally more fascinated by the brilliant fancy of Ariosto.

If we come to modern romantic times we find Coleridge earnestly encouraging a study of the poet. It is interesting to note that the translation which, in spite of its many faults, must still be regarded as the most satisfactory for one possessing no knowledge of Italian, and which has done more than any other to make Dante widely known to English readers—we mean that of Cary—was, quite at the outset of its career, instrumental in bringing about Coleridge's course of Dante lectures, which probably first aroused a general interest in the *Comedy* in this country. Cary's tomb in Westminster Abbey, with its simple inscription "Translator of Dante," will remain as a lasting monument of this Dante revival in England.

The chord of Liberty that the great Italian had struck with such admirable results in Italy, and to a lesser degree in France, naturally resounded

¹ Cf., for example, *F. Q.* II., iii. 40-41, with *Inf.* xxiv. 46-52.

in the works of the great English poets of this period: for was not love of Liberty "the immediate jewel of their souls"? Wordsworth exclaimed at the sight of "Dante's Seat" in Florence:

. . . A Throne,
In just esteem, it rivals; though no style
Be there of decoration to beguile
The mind, depressed by thought of greatness flown.
As a true man, who long had served the lyre,
I gazed with earnestness, and dared no more.
But in his breast the mighty Poet bore
A Patriot's heart, warm with undying fire.
Bold with the thought, in reverence I sate down,
And, for a moment, filled the empty Throne.

And the same feelings had filled the breasts of two at least of the great triad of poets which adorned our literature at the beginning of the century.¹ Like so many of the poets of the continent, they revered in Dante, above all, one of the "kings of thought who waged contention with their times' decay."—Byron has testified to his deep admiration of the poet, and to his understanding of the man, in his *Prophecy*, which is probably one of his best efforts, as it certainly is

¹ Keats does not appear to have made a deep study of Dante's work, although there are some allusions to it in his poems—for instance, in the sonnet *On a Dream*.

one of the most elevated in tone. We fully share the opinion of Dean Plumptre, who ascribes Byron's noble train of thought at this period to his communion "with a loftier and purer soul."—Shelley tells us in one of his letters of "one solitary spot in Milan Cathedral, where the light of day is dim and yellow under the storied window," which he had chosen to visit and read Dante there. And, indeed, it is just the spiritual mysticism in keeping with such a spot, which we detect in the writings of Shelley, and which we are inclined to ascribe to a study of the *Comedy* and love-works of Dante. This may, perhaps, be best observed in the *Epipsychidion*, the introduction to which, with its lovely translation from Dante, sufficiently shows its author's sympathy with the great Italian.

If we turn to our great modern poets, whose wide range of culture includes an intimate acquaintance with Dante, we fail to see that any of them, with the exception of Tennyson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, have derived inspiration from him, unless by way of allusion or episode. We might have been tempted to attribute their enthusiasm for the Middle Ages to the study of the *Comedy*; but even here we must not overlook the importance of Chaucer's claims, except in the case

of the great American student of our poet, Longfellow, where Dante's was almost certainly the preponderating influence.¹

We have no need of the beautiful "lines written at the request of the Florentines," to tell us that

¹ Another American poet deserving of mention is Thomas William Parsons. His translation of the *Comedy* was the work of his life. But this is not all. A merely cursory glance through his poems, some of which are based on texts from Dante, others on his episodes, while nearly all show traces of the Tuscan's spirit and mode of thought, will suffice to convince the reader of the truth of what Louise Guiney says in her memoir of the poet (prefixed to his translation of the *Commedia*, 1893): . . . "The ideals of Dante ceased not to sway and colour his disciple's mind. . . . Never was a poet more under a noble spell than this one. It is no exaggeration to say that to him Dante was heart-blood and life-breath, and not absent from his inmost meditations." In the Preface to the same volume, Mr. Charles Eliot Norton, speaking of Longfellow, Lowell, and Parsons, characterises them as "three poets who had each devoted a large portion of his life to the study of Dante's work, and contributed as no other scholars have done to diffuse his influence in this country." We need scarcely add that Mr. Norton himself makes a worthy fourth in this brilliant company.—The closing lines of Parsons' *On a Bust of Dante* will be of interest :

Before his name the nations bow ;
His words are parcel of mankind !
Deep in whose hearts, as on his brow,
The marks have sunk of Dante's mind.

Tennyson was an ardent student and admirer of Dante, as his works everywhere show traces of the Florentine's genius.¹ In the English poet we find the same love of symbolism and allegory, and he is said to have compared the structure of his *In Memoriam*, with its sorrowful beginning and joyful ending, to that of the *Comedy*. We do not know how many of the traits of *The Poet* were supplied by thoughts of Dante; but the piece undoubtedly conjures up the figure of the Florentine, in its masculine conception of the poet's vocation. And such poems as *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* show that Tennyson practised as well as preached, and made himself the voice of his age. Then, again, the subtle inner analysis of *Maud*, for example, at times inevitably recalls the poet of the *Vita Nuova*. If we consider Tennyson's images and similes, we are struck especially by such passages as the following, which are eminently Dantesque in manner :

Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

¹ We refrain from enumerating single passages of imitation, &c., the more especially as Paolo Bellezza has put together a goodly number, in some cases with rare judgment, in his *La Vita e le Opere di Alfredo Tennyson* (Firenze, 1894), pp. 124-136.

Or :

But as a man to whom a dreadful loss
Falls in a far land and he knows it not,
But coming back he learns it, and the loss
So pains him that he sickens nigh to death.¹

Also the descriptions of nature resemble those of the Italian poet in their delicate minuteness. And finally we have the *Ulysses* and Enid's *Song of Fortune*, which only borrow the *leit-motif*, as it were, from Dante, and show a far deeper study and comprehension of the spirit of the original passages than a mere imitation could do.

Of all men known to fame, Michelangelo and Rossetti are probably the two whose works in literature and art are most thoroughly imbued with Dante's spirit.² It has been well said of the masterly collection of versions from the Italian, entitled *Dante and his Circle*, that they are fac-similes of the originals in form and spirit, and have become indestructibly incorporated with English literature. They form, as it were, a

¹ There are innumerable instances of this kind. A very striking one, too long for quotation, is in *The Marriage of Geraint* (p. 346a of the complete 1 vol. edition), where Enid's voice is likened to that of a bird.

² We must spare a word, too, for Rossetti's sister Christina, who probably derived much of her mystical religious faith from the *Commedia*.

transition to Rossetti's original poetry, which reproduces all the poetic diction and methods, all the mystic love and tenderness of Dante's lyrics.¹

Great as was Rossetti the poet, we rank Rossetti the artist yet higher. But before touching his importance in this field, we would for a moment go back to the sources from which he drew his inspiration. And here, in the domain of Art, Dante stands before us a truly imposing figure! From some points of view it may be said that the grand religious art of Italy forms the best and noblest commentary to the *Commedia*. It has ever been thus: the history of culture teaches us, in more epochs than one, that poetry engendered by religion, in its turn gives birth to art. Homer forms a striking parallel to Dante. He, too, stood at the threshold of his country's glory in literature and art. Like the *Commedia*, the Homeric poems contain plastic and picturesque motives of such beauty, that the artists were dazzled by their splendour, and sought in them their inspiration.

We may construct a complete theory of art from

¹ We believe it to be generally recognised that the more recent cultivation by English poets, such as Swinburne, Andrew Lang, and Gosse, of other forms of old verse, notably the French, is mainly due to the influence of Rossetti, who first opened their eyes to the beauty of the Romance metres.

Dante's works, the essence of which is contained in the words : All beauty is divine :

La divina bontà, che da sè sperne
Ogni livore, ardendo in sè sfavilla
Sì che dispiega le bellezze eterne.

Par. vii. 64.

That Nature stands half-way between God and Art, is made clear in the following well-known passage :

Filosofia, mi disse, a chi la intende,
Nota, non pure in una sola parte,
Come natura lo suo corso prende
Dal divino intelletto e da sua arte.
E, se tu ben la tua Fisica note,
Tu troverai, non dopo molte carte,
Che l' arte vostra quella, quanto puote,
Segue, come il maestro fa il discente ;
Sì che vostr' arte a Dio quasi è nipote.

Inf. xi. 97.

Most wonderful for his time are his notions of the Ideal of Art :

Qual di pennel fu maestro o di stile,
Che ritraesse l' ombre e i tratti, ch' ivi
Mirar farieno ogn' ingegno sottile ?
Morti li morti, e i vivi parean vivi :

Non vide me' di me chi vide il vero,
Quant 'io calcai fin che chinato givi.

Purg. xii. 64.

Or when he speaks of

. . . marmo candido ed adorno
D' intagli sì che non pur Policreto,
Ma la natura lì avrebbe scorno.—*Purg.* x. 31.¹

However, with true artistic instinct he feels that this ideal can never be attained :

Ma or convien che il mio seguir desista
Più dietro a sua bellezza, poetando,
Come all' ultimo suo ciascuno artista.

Par. xxx. 31.

Or :

Ma la natura la dà sempre scema,
Similmente operando all' artista
C' ha l' abito dell' arte e man che trema.

Par. xiii. 76.

¹ The great advance marked by these passages will be brought into greater relief, if we set them by the side of the following words from the *Nibelungenlied*, which express the theory and practice current in the Middle Ages : " Thus stood so lovely the child of Siegelinde, as if he were limned on parchment by a master's art ; for all granted that hero so beautiful they had never seen." (vv. 1137-1140, according to Lachmann).

Or again :

Vero è che come forma non s' accorda
Molte fiate alla intenzion dell' arte,
Perch 'a risponder la materia è sorda ;

Par. i. 127.

Dante tell us himself, in the passage from the *Inferno* we have just quoted, that for the theory of God, Nature, and Art he is indebted to Aristotle. Of course his direct source is the *Summa* of Aquinas, which contains the æsthetics of the Christian Middle Ages. The Pantheistic theory of Universal Nature had already sunk deep into Christian thought, but it was reserved for Dante to carry this theory into practice. He was the first to open his eyes to the wonders of nature around him, and to depict them with a keenness of observation and a beauty of expression that have never been surpassed.¹ He studied all natural phenomena with the eye and the intellect of one that loved all Beauty not only for its own sake, but as reflecting Him that created all things. Nor did he limit himself to Nature alone. Nothing, provided only it came from personal observation, did Dante consider beneath the dignity of supplying those

¹ Ruskin speaks somewhere in his *Modern Painters* of "getting the abstract of mediæval landscape out of Dante."

images which form one of the chief beauties of his poem : ¹ he never hesitated to avail himself of the most insignificant occurrences of everyday life in order to illustrate his meaning. We must always bear in mind that Dante wrote in the first instance for his contemporaries, and he evidently knew that they would appreciate his "naturalism," in however crude a form it might be expressed. And it is thus we picture Dante's age to ourselves, as perfectly ripe, after generations of theory, for this new phase of feeling, which was soon to find its most perfect expression in art. It is plain that the Byzantine school of painting could no longer appeal to popular sympathy. In the same way that Dante had given up all the conventionalities of the mediæval poets, such as their use of the bestiaries, in order to draw his inspiration at the pure fount of Nature herself, we see the Italian painters, from Giotto onwards, treating the usual scenes from the Holy Scriptures in a totally new spirit, and arousing general enthusiasm :

Credette Cimabue nella pittura

Tener lo campo, ed ora ha Giotto il grido,

Sì che la fama di colui è oscura.—*Purg.* xi. 94.

¹ Thorwaldsen, among other subjects from Dante, actually based the representation of a flock of sheep, to form part of a work destined for the Quirinal (1811), on the lovely description in *Purg.* iii. 79-84.

Not only do we find the new æsthetic theory perfectly expressed in the *Comedy*, not only does the religious art of Italy regard that work as one of its chief sources of inspiration, but we may, with every probability of truth, assume that Giotto, the founder of the new school, developed his artistic principles in direct personal intercourse with the poet himself. The fact that so many of Giotto's finest compositions are manifestly inspired by the *Commedia*, speaks conclusively for the poet's influence on the new artistic movement. We need only mention the *Annunziata* in the little church of Padua, the frescoes in the Church of S. Francesco at Ravenna (where Dante was living at the time), the visions of the Apocalypse at Naples (painted, as Vasari tells us, according to Dante's hints), the paintings of the life of S. Francesco at Assisi (where the saint, marrying Poverty, is obviously drawn from the 11th canto of the *Paradiso*).¹ It is, of course,

¹ There is a famous passage in the *Decameron* (vi. 5), where Giotto is said to paint so naturally, "that often, in the things done by him, it has happened that men's power of vision was in error, in that they considered that to be real which was in truth painted." (Cf. this with *Purg.* xii. 64-69, quoted on pp. 94, 95.)—Philip Villani says of him that *poesis extitit æmulator*.

impossible to dwell on each of the succeeding painters at equal length, and we shall content ourselves by quoting what Professor Middleton says of Giotto, that he is "perhaps the most important painter in the history of the development of art, for during the whole of the 14th century the painters of Florence may be said to have been his pupils or imitators."

On the one hand we have a new terrorism in art, which may be traced to the *Inferno*, while, on the other hand, the symbolism of the *Paradiso*, the mingling of theology, poetry, and mysticism, the angels and the saints, exercised a charm over the minds of the leading painters that was destined to be more lasting still. These noble subjects inspired the old Italians to the composition of works of art, which, in spite of their crude *technique*, may rank with the masterpieces of all times. It was not to be expected, however, that the ideal conceived by Dante should have been attained by his contemporary. Botticelli was already a distinct advance on Giotto, and, like him, a worshipper of Dante. The illustrations to the *Comedy* sufficiently bring out all the points of this superiority. It has been held by some, notably by the pre-Raphaelite school, that with this painter the apogee of Christian art had been

attained. Be this as it may, we cannot help considering that the climax of Dante's glory was reached when Raphael and Michelangelo also paid their tribute to his genius. The frescoes in the *Salla della Segnatura* in the Sistine Chapel breathe all the mystic symbolism of the *Paradiso*. Especially instructive would be a minute study of the *Disputa*.¹ And, at a later period of the painter's life, we have the grand *Transfiguration*, in which the conception of the Divine and human nature was evidently inspired by Dante's dualism.

We must not gauge Michelangelo's indebtedness to Dante by any single examples. He was, indeed, far too great a man to follow any one blindly, and the stamp of his own genius is to be found deeply impressed on all his works; but that his genius was in a large measure moulded on that of Dante, is a fact that scarcely needs a word of proof. Byron may well make Dante in the *Prophecy* say of Michelangelo :

The stream of his great thoughts shall spring from me.

We find in him and in his works the same severity, haughtiness, and independence, the same

¹ To give a single instance, we might select the figure of Theology, in the fresco illustrating that science; it is manifestly traceable to *Purg.* xxx. 31 ff.

patriotism, the same love of all that is good and true, and contempt for meanness, mediocrity, and flattery, the same intense sadness and thought of things beyond the tomb. As the contemplated statue of Dante remained a project, and as the illustrations to the *Comedy* were lost at sea, we must value all the more the sonnets addressed by Michelangelo to the man he revered above all others, as the only direct testimony remaining to us of the sympathy inspired by one of the greatest geniuses of all times, in the breast of one who was in every way worthy to be his disciple. In spite of all that Dante had to suffer, Michelangelo is led by his veneration for the poet to exclaim :

Fuss' io pur lui ! ch 'a tal fortuna nato,
Per l' aspro esilio suo, con la virtute,
Dare' del mondo il più felice stato.

This is not the place to tell over again the old story of the influence of the Italian art in Europe, nor is it our intention to relate its decline in Italy. We would only recall the pregnant words of Cornelius, which we quoted at the outset, the truth of which is sufficiently attested by the fact that art critics, especially in Italy, are at the present day continually calling on the young generation of

painters to draw on Dante for their subjects.¹ Since the middle of the last century the power of Dante's episodes has gradually attracted painters of every nationality. We cannot attempt to deal with Italy, for that would lead us too far, and must content ourselves with the single example of Duprè, who once wrote :—"Credo averti detto più volte, che spesso, posando lo scalpello, leggo la *Divina Commedia*." In the 16th century the Dutch painter Stradanus, a pupil of Vasari, made those extraordinary illustrations to the *Comedy* which have only quite recently been given to the world. In Germany there is Cornelius himself, whose designs for the *Paradiso* are so beautiful and conceived so thoroughly in the Dantesque spirit, that we cannot sufficiently regret the circumstances which prevented their execution as frescoes at his hands. In France, too, we have some of the most distinguished painters falling under the same sway: Ary Scheffer, for example, and Ingres, and the greatest of them all, Eugène Delacroix, whose Dante cult extended over the whole of his

¹ We may instance Pietro Selvatico, in his essay *Delle arti belle in relazione a Dante* (in the publication *Dante e il suo secolo*).—Cf. also Ruskin's advice concerning the figure of Charity in his *Modern Painters*.

life. In 1822 he made his *début* with the famous *Bark of Charon*, and the *Trajan* of 1840 may certainly be assumed to be taken direct from the *Purgatorio*, while the *Dante and Virgil* of 1845 is generally considered one of his very greatest works.¹ Speaking of the French Romantic art, Théophile Gautier says: "En ce temps—là, la peinture et la poésie fraternisaient. Les artistes lisaient les poètes et les poètes visitaient les artistes. On trouvait Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe, lord Byron et Walter Scott dans l'atelier comme dans le cabinet d'étude."²—Of Englishmen we shall content ourselves with naming Reynolds, Flaxman and the mystic Blake, before we return to the poet-painter, whose name must ever be associated with that of Dante in the annals of English art.

Rossetti's importance for us does not lie so much in the fact that so many of his subjects are directly drawn from Dante,³ as that he was one

¹ George Sand, alluding to his first period, says: "Il s'est inspiré du Dante, de Shakespeare et de Goethe, et les romantiques, ayant trouvé en lui leur plus haute expression, ont cru qu'il appartenait exclusivement à leur école." (*Histoire de ma vie.*)

² *Histoire du Romantisme* (chapter on Delacroix).

³ Such are: *Dante's Dream*, *Beata Beatrix*, *Paolo and Francesca*, *Dante and Beatrix*, *Bocca Baciata*, *Dante awakening from his Dream*, &c.

of the chief founders, the very centre, of the pre-Raphaelite school of painting. The Brotherhood strove to adhere as closely as possible to nature, as Giotto and his followers had done; but, while borrowing this leading characteristic from the old Italians, the pupils naturally surpassed their masters in point of *technique*. It is not to be wondered at that the combination of these qualities, as represented by several admirable artists, should have produced a great impression on the artistic fashions and tastes of our time. Professor Middleton says of the school that "their rise, development, and wide-spread influence on painting have been the chief artistic event of the century."¹

Surely no writer has ever exercised an influence so intense on minds so varied. Shakespeare alone might be compared to Dante in this respect, but even then it must be borne in mind that the

¹ An artist summing up much of what we have been saying is Adolf Stürler, a pupil of Ingres, who, having been sent by his master to Rome, in order to study the *Stanze*, was, on the way, chained for twenty-five years to Florence, owing to the fascination exercised over him by Cimabue and Giotto. The chief work of his life are one hundred illustrations of the *Comedy*, done in the style of these early Italians, which are for the most part admirable, and deserving of a far wider recognition than they have as yet obtained.

Commedia is a work far more abstruse than are the plays of Shakespeare, taken as a whole, and requires far more study for its full appreciation.—The distinguished critic, whose name is so closely linked to that of the pre-Raphaelites, appears to have formulated the greater part of his theories on art after an intense study of the *Commedia*, the fruits of which we see in all his writings, notably in the *Modern Painters*.¹

In the realm of music we have Liszt's *Dante Symphony*, which is probably the greatest work of the master, who called it "das eigenste Kind seiner Leiden." Richard Wagner, to whom it is dedicated, and for the mystical and symbolical side of whose genius the *Comedy* must have had a great fascination, went so far as to say of the symphony: "Dies ist die Seele des Dante'schen Gedichts in reinster Verklärung."²

If we turn to another department we find Döllinger earnestly advising all Italian statesmen to study the *Commedia* in every period of crisis, and to regard it as the Romans did their Sibylline books. In this connection we may mention that

¹ We have Mr. Ruskin's own testimony on this point in the Appendix iii., vol. III. of his works.

² In the essay *Das Publikum in Zeit und Raum* (Werke X.). Cf. also the Correspondence with Liszt.

in the army of Dante translators figure prominently a King of Saxony and, quite recently, an ex-President of the Argentine Republic, General Mitre, renowned as a great patriot and man of highest integrity.—We would also call attention to two conspicuous examples, in our own country, of statesmen who have devoted much of their time and thought to the poem. In Macaulay's diary we find the following entry, written in Florence (Nov. 3, 1838): "I believe that very few people have ever had their minds more thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of any great work than mine is with that of the *Divine Comedy*." Bearing in mind certain magnanimous traits in Macaulay's character, we would interpret this as meaning principally moral influence, and we would apply the same remark to the case of Mr. Gladstone, from whom we have the following emphatic utterance:¹ "You have been good enough to call that 'supreme poet' a solemn master for me. These are not empty words. The reading of Dante is not merely a pleasure, a *tour de force*, or a lesson, it is a rigorous discipline for the heart, the intellect, the whole man. In the school of Dante I have learnt a great part of that mental provision

¹ From a letter to Giuliani, which appeared in the *Standard*, September 1, 1883.

(however insignificant it be) which has served me to make the journey of life up to the term of nearly seventy-three years. And I should like to extend your excellent phrase, and to say that he who labours for Dante, labours to serve Italy, Christianity, the world."

It is touching to hear from the lips of men who have been sceptics all their lives, how they have been solaced in their old age by a study of the great religious poem. Schlosser is a good illustration of what we mean. He tells us in his *Dante-Studien*: "One who has, like Dante, beside whom the author scarcely ventures to name himself, borne the heavy burden of life's toil and strife, and who, from a spiritual want, has found no satisfaction in scientific, philosophical, and theological studies, and who, at the same time, does not choose to bear the yoke of blind faith, which some people again wish to impose on humanity, will seek for solace in Dante. For he cannot find refuge from the hubbub of the time either in scientific studies of nature and the inner connection of all her phenomena, as they are now taught, or in true mysticism. A definition of true or false mysticism the author cannot give in this place, because he does not wish to philosophise nor, indeed, to teach anything systematically, but only to make it

clear how he, who is accustomed to regard life on earth in an absolutely earthly light, has, in his solitude, made use of Dante, Landino, and Vellutello, in order to infuse a heavenly light into his inner life. He might perhaps have found consolation also in the doctrines of the more recent natural philosophers, who see God in the close relationship existing between all natural phenomena, on which ground they are wrongly named Materialists or Pantheists ; but, on the one hand, he was too little acquainted with the connection existing between all natural phenomena, while, on the other, the fact remained that, as the apostle expresses it, 'the spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.' He continued, then, to believe in a double—an inner and an outer world. Dante appeared to him great just because he had grasped both these existences, and because he is, on the one hand, as practical and historically critical, as he is, on the other, quite lost in the ideal of Divine and human wisdom, and Love and Mercy and Truth (his Beatrice)."¹

The younger Hallam, in the oration we have

¹ Of Auguste Comte we are told that "he looked on the daily reading of a canto of the *Commedia* and a chapter of the *De Imitatione* as an almost essential element in the spiritual self-culture of the religion of humanity."

already had occasion to quote, is interesting as representing a more purely Christian sentiment. He is strongly against the German Materialists and their followers in this country, and urges with great fervour the study of Dante in order to counteract their influence.¹

The moral influence of the *Commedia* would appear, indeed, to have taken root more deeply in England² than in any other country outside Italy,

¹ The historian Hallam, in the memoir prefixed to his son's writings, speaks of Dante as "a poet who was afterwards to become, more perhaps than any other, the master-mover of his spirit."—In the *In Memoriam* (lxxxix.) we have a pleasant passage which shows us that Tennyson was probably urged to study the poet by the example of his young friend:

O bliss, when all in circle drawn
About him, heart and ear were fed
To hear him, as he lay and read
The Tuscan poets on the lawn.

² In 1887 appeared *How Dante climbed the Mountain* (Sunday Readings with the Children from the *Purgatorio*), by Rose Selfe. In a preface the Bishop of Ripon, Dr. Carpenter, agrees with the authoress that the "story of the Purgatory is within the grasp of children, and that it is full of clear and bright teaching; rightly used it becomes a sort of *Pilgrim's Progress*, full of deep truth and life-lessons." Another characteristic publication is *Dante's Pilgrim's Progress*, or the Passage of the Blessed Soul from the Slavery of the Present Corruption to the Liberty of the Eternal Glory,"

where Dante has naturally always been regarded as a moral teacher, ever since Boccaccio, probably at the instigation of the authorities, made so many of his lectures on the poem partake of the nature of sermons. It is surely no mere coincidence that so many of our leading divines are, or have been, among the most zealous students of the poet, and that they should have done so much for the appreciation of his work in England. The names of Milman, Church, Liddon, Plumptre, Farrar, occur to us at the present moment, and the list might easily be augmented. There is a passage in Archdeacon Farrar's sermon on *Dante*¹ that so well represents the spirit of the Dante studies with which we are dealing, that we give it in spite of its length: "It is because such a poet seems to me peculiarly fitted to search and elevate this age, and to make it blush for its favourite vices, that I have ventured to speak of

by Emilia Gurney (1893). This book is dedicated to Dr. Carpenter, who, in a letter prefixed, says that "in Dante, as in more sacred literature, 'the letter killeth, and the spirit giveth life;'" while the general preface reproduces in substance what Arthur Hallam said sixty years ago.—Similar in tendency are, among others, J. H. Morison's *Dante* (in *The Great Poets as Religious Teachers*, 1886), and Mr. Wicksteed's *Sermons*.

¹ *Sermons and Addresses delivered in America.*

him. There is no function which poets can fulfil comparable to their high posthumous privilege of permanently enriching the blood of the world and raising humanity to higher levels. Nations that possess such poets as Dante and Milton ought never to degenerate. But they belong not to nations only, but to all the world. If any young men should chance to be among my audience to-night, I would earnestly invite them to hold high and perpetual companionship with such souls as these. And if there should be any here who have hitherto found their chief delight in meaner things, which dwarf the intellectual faculties and blunt the moral sense, I would fain hope that here and there one of them may be induced to turn away from such follies, to breathe the pure, difficult, eager air of severe and holy poems like the *Divina Commedia* and the *Paradise Lost*." And after these eloquent words follows a regular sermon, with moral precepts based on the text of the *Comedy*.

Dante may be compared to the Hebrew prophets in the sublimity of his language, the sternness of his aims, the depth of his meaning. If we would come under the sway of his mighty poem, and profit by its profound teaching, we must, above all, grasp the wonderful allegorical

significance that is "hidden beneath the veil of the strange verses." Writing to Can Grande, Dante said: "If the poem is taken in its allegorical sense, it treats of man, according as he is entitled to praise or blame through the freedom of his will, and subject to the rule of rewarding or avenging Justice."¹

To follow from age to age, and from country to country—in more detail than was possible, or indeed called for, in the present sketch—the changing fortunes of Dante studies, would be one of the most interesting of literary investigations, as it would, at the same time, constitute an important contribution to the history of European morals. It is significant that the present century,

¹ We must not forget that Dante tells us in several passages that his aim was didactic. Thus, for example, in the same letter to Can Grande: "The aim of the whole and of the individual parts is to redeem those who live in this world from the state of misery and to lead them to the state of bliss."—Or where he makes Cacciaguida address him as follows:

. . . se la voce tua sarà molesta
Nel primo gusto, vital nutrimento
Lascerà poi quando sarà digesta.

Par. xvii. 130.

Cf. also the *Se Dio ti lasci, lettor, prender frutto Di tua lezione*, of *Inf.* xx. 19; *Purg.* xxx. 136-138; *Purg.* xxxii. 103-105, &c., &c.

which has witnessed more than any of the preceding ones an ever-widening circle of culture, and the largest additions to the store of our knowledge, in every department of science and thought, should also have witnessed the raising of the matchless figure of Dante to a pinnacle it had never before attained.

The primary causes of this universal interest in the great Italian are certainly to be sought in that mighty wave of cosmopolitanism which swept over Europe after the Revolution, embracing all ages and all countries. Mediævalism, with which we are here concerned, was only a portion of that great revulsion and widening of thought, and in connection with this, as we have seen, sprang up the Gothic Revival and various schools in religion, letters, and art. Now, if we combine all this with the consideration of a phenomenon which Karl Hillebrand was the first to point out distinctly,¹ namely, that our latest phase of literary and historical criticism is to study the masterpieces of literature mainly with the view of becoming better acquainted with the ages that produced them (as opposed to the old-fashioned opposite course); and if we, finally, bear in mind that Dante was instinctively felt on all sides to embody in a

¹ In his *Études Italiennes*.

marvellous way that Middle Age which was attracting such an enormous share of public attention and thought—then, we think, the whole mystery is explained, why he began to be studied by the theologian, by the man of letters, by the artist, and then by the public that desired to comprehend these. And thus, in the end, Dante himself gave a further impulse to the studies which had, in the first instance, been, to a large extent, the cause of his own revival.

The chasm between ancient and modern times, which so long had gone by the name of the "Dark Ages," has been proved to be a mere phantasmagoria under the searching light of modern scholarship. We now have an unbroken record of the world's history. The Middle Ages have become thoroughly explored, and may be summed up in the great personality of Dante. From his high beacon he will continue to spread light to coming generations, who will derive guidance and solace from his example and his teaching.

ADDITION.

As footnote to "avoided," p. 21, line 7 from top.

The efforts of the trobadors and their imitators in this direction are more or less conventional; and though this conventionality has left its mark on Dante's earlier poetry, there are absolutely no traces of it in the *Commedia*.



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